

THE IMPACT OF RACIAL IDENTITY STATUS ON MARITAL SATISFACTION  
IN OLDER AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLES

By

JENNIFER WILSON

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by

Jennifer Wilson

For my parents,  
This is as much your achievement as mine.

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The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of racial identity attitudes upon levels of marital satisfaction in a population of older African American couples. The effect of the independent variables of age, length of marriage, and income level upon both racial identity attitudes and marital satisfaction were also investigated. This study was intended to increase knowledge about aging in the African American population as there is a dearth of empirical investigation on this topic.

Forty-six married Black couples over the age of 55 participated in the study. They completed assessment measures on marital satisfaction and racial identity development. The independent variables were selected based upon extant literature that posited these factors had significant impact on previously studied populations of older adults.

To investigate the relationships among the independent and dependent variables, a series of multiple regression analyses, dependent t-tests, and product-moment correlations were utilized. Results of the analyses showed that, of the four measurable stages of racial identity development, only Preencounter attitudes of racial identity significantly affected marital satisfaction in a negative manner. The couples did not differ significantly, either by gender or within-couple, on any other measure. Similarly, the only strong correlation existed between higher couple scores on the Preencounter subscale of racial identity attitude measure and lower reported scores of marital satisfaction for these couples. Some moderate negative correlations existed between participants' scores on the Encounter subscale of racial identity and marital satisfaction as well as between the participants' age and income level.

Additionally, meanings and limitations of the study results were discussed as were the study's implications for theory, clinical practice, counselor education and training, and future research.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made;  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all!  
Be not afraid!

(Robert Browning, 1980/1864)

This familiar poem is one that often heralds the beginnings of new marriages and carries with it the connotations of undying passion, lasting love, and opportunity. One would wonder how racial group membership affects the maintenance of a satisfactory marriage in later life. For people of color, the realities of institutionalized racism, underemployment, and discrimination often serve to make life passages more challenging or difficult. Arna Bontemps (1973/1933) correctly portrayed another view of aging in later life when he described the older African American couple, Jeff and Jennie Patton, in her short story, "A Summer Tragedy."

Jeff thought of the handicaps, the near impossibility, of making another crop with his leg bothering him more and more each week. Then there was always the chance that he would have another stroke, like the one that had made him lame. Another one might kill him. The least it could do would be to leave him helpless. Jeff gasped . . . Lord, Jesus! He could not bear to think of being helpless, like a baby, on Jennie's hands. Frail, blind, Jennie. (p. 145)

For this couple, the "best was not yet to be" as their many years of dedication to one another and their enduring daily toil culminated in a suicide pact that transported them away from the struggles of life on earth.

However, despite the inevitable hardships that confront people of African descent in their daily lives, the satisfaction of an intimate relationship may be an important source of support. An aging couple may offer each other love and succor from the hardships of aging in a racist society. Alice Walker's (1968) poem, "Medicine," describes the devotion between an older Black couple. The narrator's grandmother shares a bed with her ill grandfather so that she may attend to his pain during the night. The narrator realizes that the healing power is their closeness when she says, "The medicine is all in her long unbraided hair" (p. 88). Henry Dumas' (1989) poetic work, "Grandma's Got a Wig," beautifully illustrates the continued sense of love, fun, and attraction between an older Black couple.

These literary works exemplify the heterogeneous nature of the aging process, and the varied experiences of the African American protagonists also remind the reader of the great diversity that is found within the Black population (Black, 1996). The pleasure and pain that accompany aging have been the focus of poets, writers, and artists for centuries. Social scientists have only recently focused their attentions upon these vital subjects.

#### Background

While poets and writers have long utilized the subject of aging and intimate relationships as fodder for their respective crafts, the closer examination of marriage in older age, and even older age itself, has been relatively ignored by the counseling

profession until recent years (Brody & Semel, 1993). While counseling researchers and practitioners have striven for a multicultural focus during the past few decades, they have neglected to combine the areas of gerontology, marriage, and racial group membership. This has resulted in a paucity of information regarding both the marital relationships and the racial identity of older African Americans.

It may be helpful to focus first upon the changing demographic picture of the United States. As the recognition of the flourishing numbers of older adults in Western society has increased, the bandying about of such phrases as the "greying of America" have become commonplace. However, the real impact of this phenomenon is beginning to be noted as the end of the millennium draws near. The demographic shifting of American society provides data that clearly point to the necessity of addressing the needs of older minority group adults in counseling theory, research and practice.

Currently, 32.8 million people are 65 years of age or older. This number represents 12.7% of the United States' population (Butler, Lewis, & Sunderland, 1991; Wolinsky, 1990). This represents a national increase of 5% since 1990 (Fowles, 1994). The current statistics regarding the aging population can be termed "slow growth" when compared with the projected figures for the 21st century. With the advent of the aging "Baby Boomers," the numbers of older adults are expected to increase rapidly between the years 2020 and 2030. By the year 2030, there are expected to be approximately 70 million adults representing 20% of the national population (Fowles, 1994; McManus, 1996).



As the general population of Americans continues its rapid change in age structure, so, too, does the shifting demographic picture of older ethnic groups. Persons of color represent approximately 13% of the older population. This number is predicted to increase by the year 2025 to comprise 25% of the 65+ population (AARP Minority Affairs Information, 1996). The older ethnic minority population is increasing faster than the group of older non-Hispanic Whites, and, in fact, "between 1990 and 2030, the White non-Hispanic population that is 65+ is projected to increase by 93% as compared with 328% for older minorities " (Fowles, 1994, p. 2).

A further breakdown of population statistics indicates that older Black adults constitute "the fastest growing segment of the Black population" (AARP, 1996, p. 2). According to the American Association of Retired Persons (1996), the total Black population grew by 13% between 1980 and 1990, but Black individuals who were aged 65 and older increased their numbers by 20%. Currently, older adults represent 8% of the Black population in the United States. These statistics provide clear evidence that supports the need to increase awareness regarding the needs of older African Americans and their families.

The state of advanced medical technology and health awareness has greatly impacted human longevity for people of all races. It is now possible to study the marriages of older adults. In the past, the death of a spouse often precluded the experience of marriage in later life (Askham, 1994; Melton, Hersen, Van Sickle, & Van Hasselt, 1995; Troll, 1986). It has been reported that one-third of all older adults in the United States are married (Johnston, 1990; Long & Mancini, 1990). The U.S. Bureau of

the Census (1994) reported that in 1993, 56.5% of the African American men who were 65 years old and older were married, and 26.4% of the African American women 65 years old and older were married.

There are proportionally fewer married older Black couples in the United States population. The numbers of aged African Americans who are divorced or widowed are also higher than those in White populations. Stanford, Peddecord, and Lockery (1990) reported that "lower percentages of Blacks are married among the young-old (65-74) and the old-old (75+) when compared to Whites" (p. 232). However, this may be due to shorter life spans for members of ethnic minorities as well as high levels of environmental stress (e.g., poverty, racism) for people of color in the United States. Therefore, assumptions must not be made about the reasons for the differences in marital status statistics. In fact, the literature indicates that the institution of marriage is important for older Black couples (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coke & Twaite, 1995).

The impact of marital relationships on the well-being of older adults has been examined primarily in the sociological literature. Although there are some gender differences, research findings seem to indicate that marriage has a favorable impact upon the life satisfaction and self-assessed happiness of older adults (Askham, 1994; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990). These authors purported that there exists a strong relationship between long-term marriage and the physical and mental health of the spouses.

Although there is some discrepancy among researchers as to the changing nature of the divorce rate for older couples (Brubaker, 1990; Melton et al., 1995; Thorson, 1995; Weishaus & Field, 1988), it is clear that the rates of divorce are less for older adults than

for other age groups. Divorce is more likely to occur before couples grow old together, and Butler et al. (1991) maintained that older couples perceive threats from outside the marital union as being more significant than those generated within the dyad. "It might be said that marriage becomes a more valued human relationship by the very fact of powerful outside forces and eventual death. When so many other losses are occurring naturally, marriage may be one of the more familiar and comfortable patterns remaining" (Butler et al., 1991, p. 50).

A closer look at marriage yields the significance of this type of bond for older adults. Facing later life can become primarily a couple task in this society, particularly for those partners who have "launched" all of their children or for those who are geographically distant from their offspring. It has been suggested that for couples who are able to sustain marriages into their later years, the significance of their union becomes greater as they experience some of the losses associated with aging. The marital dyad "is often the sole group to which elderly individuals belong . . . role and membership give support, define behavior and bolster morale" (Wolinsky, 1990, p. 48).

The increase in the numbers of older African Americans, as well as the prevalence of the marital relationships, has great implications for the state of research in the social sciences. Older Black adults and their relationships have been the topic of much speculation but little empirical research (Engram & Lockery, 1993).

The intimate relationships of African Americans must be examined within the context of their experiences in the United States. Extant research has often portrayed a distorted image of the marital and family relationships of Black Americans (Akbar,

1991). The lack of awareness regarding the impact of societal oppression has contributed to the perpetuation of these myths. The constant comparison to White research groups also dilutes the significance of research findings regarding African American people (Akbar, 1991; Obudho, 1983).

Azibo (1992) made the critical point that "Whites or Europeans are no longer the standard by which the psychology of people is judged" (p. 19). The experiences of African American older adults are important and need to be recognized as having had different influences than those of White Euro-Americans. Stanford (1990) succinctly stated, "Collectively, Black older persons should be viewed from the perspective of their own history, without having to suffer the indignity of being compared with those older persons who have, for the most part, had entirely different social, political, and economic experiences" (p. 41). Helms (1994) concurred with this notion and posited that the issue of race is often neglected or trivialized in social science research.

The experience of Black Americans must be studied from a perspective that takes into consideration the unique aspects of their history and culture. Despite the great diversity among people of African heritage, there are some shared characteristics that must be examined in the social science literature. Authors place great emphasis on the fact that the impact of slavery, institutionalized racism, and generations of discrimination have had lasting effects on today's African American population (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1996). The impact of the legacy of Africa with its particular culture and customs must also be considered (Black, 1996). In particular, the current cohort of older Black adults has endured much cultural imposition by the dominant White

group (Coke & Twaite, 1995). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important for researchers to target the life experiences and the survival mechanisms of this group to provide a new base from which to promote change and support.

As clinicians and researchers become increasingly aware of the significance and prevalence of the growing populations of non-White, married, older adults, they will need to be apprised of the similarities and differences between groups in order to effectively provide mental health services. The cultural context of older adults must be addressed when looking at marital satisfaction. It will be important to consider the impact of race, social class, socioeconomic status, and cultural values in relation to marriage.

Marital satisfaction has been widely regarded in both psychological and sociological realms as a helpful tool for assessing different aspects of the dyadic relationship. Marital satisfaction seems to have a curvilinear pattern over the life course (Herman, 1994; Orbuch, House, Mero, & Webster, 1996). Initially, many couples experience high levels of satisfaction that dip during the middle years of their union with an increase noted in later life. Gender has also been found to have an impact upon marital satisfaction. Men usually report higher marital satisfaction than women (Askham, 1994; Dickson, 1995; Troll, 1986). Gender differences have also been found in older couples regarding the interface between marital satisfaction and marital support (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994). There also appear to be some correlations between satisfaction and higher levels of health and financial status (Herman, 1994; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990).

However, this measure has been primarily studied within populations of White, middle-class Americans. To date, little data have been generated that explore the nature of

the aging marriage and its relationship to ethnic group membership. There has been little melding of more contextual issues such as age, race, and gender with marital satisfaction. As a result, the marital experiences of older African-American couples have been relatively ignored. It is critical to gain a better understanding of the experiences of this ever-expanding population in American society in order to provide appropriate services and interventions. More questions need to be asked about the impact of race on long-term marriages for African American couples.

Racial identity has been a focus of study since the Black liberation movement in the 1960s. It refers to "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1993, p. 3). While sociologists consider the issue of race to be not a biological reality but, instead, a socially constructed one (Feagin & Feagin, 1996; Helms, 1994), there is no denying the struggle of being African American in this society.

Research in this area has focused primarily upon the impact of racial identity development on the counseling relationship within samples of college students (Helms, 1984, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990). Parham (1989a, 1989b) noted the need for the theory to be tested within other age segments of the Black population to ascertain whether or not identity development is important for relationships outside the therapeutic interaction. Helms (1993) also called for further exploration regarding the impact of race on social relationships.

### Statement of the Problem

The numbers of older African Americans are increasing steadily, and for many older Black people the aging process is a stressful one that can be fraught with physical and social disadvantages. Counseling researchers, however, have not yet made this population a focus of much empirical study. The literature also indicates that the marital relationship is an important one for African American people (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coke & Twaite, 1995). To date, however, there is little extant literature regarding this subject. The continuing neglect of older African Americans is no longer acceptable in either academic, policy, or interpersonal realms.

Many questions need to be asked and answered in relation to the older Black person's adaptation to aging. Marital satisfaction and racial identity have been examined separately in relation to younger populations, yet levels of marital satisfaction are unknown in older African American couples as are racial identity development attitudes. The effects of such independent variables as age, length of marriage, educational level, and income level are also unknown in relation to older African American couples. It is currently not known how these variables interact with one another to impact the older Black adult's experience of the aging process. The potentiality of the marital dyad as a mediating factor is also of interest for the present study.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of racial identity attitudes upon levels of marital satisfaction in a population of older African American couples. The experiences of marriage and racial identity development have not been viewed from

the perspective of older persons of color. This research will help to increase knowledge about the intimate connections that sustain older Black couples in later years. This information will facilitate helping professionals with a better understanding of the life context of the older African American couple in order to appropriately provide any mental health services.

### Need for the Study

Statistically, the numbers of older people, especially the non-White population, are increasing exponentially. Many older people are married, and they are from a generation that values this type of bond. In fact, the "basic unit of family life for many older persons is the marital dyad" (Johnston, 1990, p. 348). Although the current high divorce rate will have an impact on how many long married couples exist in the future, increased rates of longevity will still make possible many long-term marital unions. The current generation of older-old and young-old married people have much to teach future generations of couples, clinicians, and researchers.

There also exists a dearth of research regarding the marital experiences of older African American people. As the counseling profession seeks to become more aware of the varied voices of older adults, a closer look is needed at how older Black adults perceive their marriages and the factors that have shaped these perceptions. It is obvious that the life experiences of people of color will be different from those of White adults, even within the same cohort. The impact of historically sanctioned racism and the current, albeit covert, types of oppression must be considered when attempting to evaluate marital satisfaction. How does being the experience of being Black impact one's



satisfaction of his or her marriage? Does marriage become more or less important, or satisfactory, to a couple with differing racial identity attitudes?

The changing demographic picture of the nation's older adults and the heretofore unacknowledged experience of African Americans in long-term marriage clearly points to the need for the present study. The way in which older couples experience their relative contentedness, or satisfaction, with their marriages may be a result of their age, income, and racial identity attitudes. Level of marital satisfaction, therefore, may be the result of various life cycle factors for husbands and wives. For example, it might be presumed that older Black couples' marital satisfaction could be affected by their respective racial identity attitudes as well as their social or environmental context.

The knowledge gleaned from this study also has implications for clinical practice. Counselors who are more familiar with the similarities and differences in older populations as well as ethnic or minority populations will be at an advantage in the therapeutic relationship. Clients would benefit from engaging in a therapeutic relationship with professionals who have an awareness of the potential impact of race, age, and gender upon their marriages. As therapists continue to raise their awareness about the diversity of the people who present for therapy services, it is critical to become learned about the perspectives and experiences of all people, not just those of the dominant culture.

Counselor training in gerontological issues is currently quite limited (Myers, Loesch, & Sweeney 1991). Few counselor preparation programs offer coursework or practical clinical experience in the area of gerontology. Sue and Sue (1990) also described

the need for further cross-cultural training in counselor education curricula. The present study has implications for further research in this area.

### Theoretical Framework

Historically, counseling research has operated from a dominant culture framework when conceptualizing the nature of marriage and the family. Increasing awareness of the ethnic and racial differences between families has promoted the use of theories that incorporate and honor these differences. In this study, the family life cycle theory, the life course perspective, and racial identity development theory offer complementary lenses through which to view the African American family in later life. The first two theories recognize the importance of family development over time as well as the dynamic processes of interpersonal interaction. Racial identity development theory recognizes and supports the idea of an evolving racial consciousness for individuals and its impact upon many aspects of their lives.

The family life cycle as pioneered by Carter and McGoldrick (1989), Duvall (1977), and Glick (1977) highlights familial changes and endeavors to explain this system in terms of a process that is in constant flux. The family is predicted to experience sequential stages, or phases, that incorporate certain developmental transitions or tasks. The negotiation of these tasks is considered to be essential for family adjustment and progression toward the next stage. The later life family is faced with the negotiations of retirement transitions, grandparenthood, and confrontation with death and loss. Marital satisfaction in older age may take on increasing importance as people begin to deal with these economic, existential, and familial issues.

Life cycle theory originally focused on familial stages that mirrored patterns of middle-class, White, nuclear families. Until recently, diversity of life cycle patterns was not often considered. Modifications of the original paradigms to better incorporate marriage and family diversity have made this theoretical framework more applicable to the research of older African American families. The work of Hines (1989) in delineating the family life cycle of impoverished Black families provided a source of differentiation from the White, middle-class, nuclear family system favored by previous theorists. The logical implication of this aspect of the family life cycle is that Black families *are* different than White families, no matter what their income level. The Black experience in America has functioned to shape a somewhat different family life cycle path for many African American families. These differences may be regarded as a source of strength and as a symbol of fortitude in the face of the institutionalized racism in the United States instead of as pathological or deviant (Schwartz & Scott, 1994).

Similarly, the life course perspective may also be used to study minority marriages and families. The theoretical framework embraced by the life course perspective is rooted in sociology, psychology, and gerontological study which results in a perspective that is both interdisciplinary and contextual (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993). The life course perspective enables researchers and clinicians to view the older Black family through a lens that incorporates their historical experience in the United States as well as their intragroup heterogeneity. This theory, "as applied to families, suggests the interlocking forces of individual, familial-generational, and social-historical structures and processes" (Bengston & Allen, 1993, p. 493).

Life course theory seeks to incorporate the nature of the individual and his or her changing family within a larger sociohistorical context. The multidisciplinary perspective of life course theory results in a position that goes beyond the biologically determined life span to incorporate family and social structure with societal history. Therefore, this position seeks to understand the African American family within its own sociohistorical context instead of directly comparing it to the White marriage and family experience.

Racial identity theory was originated in an attempt to “explain reactions to a social environment anomaly, that is, how many Black people were able to develop healthy racial identities though surrounded by a racist environment” (Helms, 1993, p. 83). The concept of a dynamic theory to explain the unfolding of a person’s Black racial consciousness has been investigated by a number of authors (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984, 1993, 1995; Parham, 1989a). Racial identity theory examines the psychological impact of one’s racial group membership on individual self-perception and group interactions (Helms, 1993).

The early theorists, working independently of one another, offered a number of variations on the same theme of an evolving Black consciousness (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Helms, 1993). The original research focused upon both typologies and stage-wise theories that have subsequently been expanded upon to provide a more dynamic and inclusive theory of racial identity development (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1995). William E. Cross’ five-stage model of “Nigrescence” has been one of the primary models that has undergone a great deal of empirical research and theoretical restructuring since the early 1970s. Helms (1995) and Parham (1989a, 1989b) have also expanded upon the theory in

an attempt to increase its relevance, validity, and salience to current sociohistorical context.

The basic tenets of the theory address the inherent racist nature of U.S. society and the ensuing impact of race on individual and group identity. Identity is defined as the conglomeration of attitudinal, affective, behavioral, and cognitive components toward self, own racial group, and other racial groups (Sue & Sue, 1990). The theory maintains that many African American people experience some cycling through the different stages, or statuses, over the course of their lifetime. There is purported to be movement from a status of low salience for racial identity, to an encounter event that impacts upon a person's sense of self as a person of color, to fully embracing one's race, and then to a more holistic understanding and appreciation for all races (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1993; Parham, 1989a, 1989b).

Helms (1995) has endeavored to refine the theory to incorporate the more inclusive notion of "statuses" instead of stages. This shift in language suggests a more permeable and recursive (Parham, 1989a, 1989b), as opposed to linear, model. Helms (1993, 1995) and Parham (1989) have been among the leading researchers in this area and expounded upon Cross' 1971 model of Black racial identity development and studied counselor-client dyadic interactions in terms of race. Helms (1993) has also proffered a framework for extrapolating her empirical research regarding interactions of counseling dyads to other social relationships such as marriage. For example, if younger pairs of Black people are predicted to have particular types of social interactions based upon their

racial identity attitudes, there is currently no evidence that would indicate that older adults would not have similar interactions.

These theoretical stances undergird this research project in terms of providing explanatory power to the idea of marital satisfaction in older age. According to life cycle theory, the African American family in later life will experience a number of different transitions that would have a potential impact upon marital satisfaction. Retirement often brings about a decrease in income which is predicted to affect the couples' relationship as is increasing older age. Grandparenthood and the involvement with child care are other issues that older African Americans must often confront. However, few researchers have examined how exactly this life cycle stage and its roles affect the marital relationships of older Black adults.

The life course perspective posits that older Black couples would be very influenced by their collective past and experiences as well as more present and concrete interactions with both blood relatives and fictive kin. The propensity for older Black couples to assume responsibility for child-rearing and caretaking is well documented (Chatters & Taylor, 1990). How exactly it impacts a couples' sense of happiness with their relationship remains unknown. "In sum, a life course perspective emphasizes the importance of time, context, process and meaning on human development and family life" (Bengston & Allen, 1993, p. 491).

Racial identity development theory was utilized to support the supposition that identity status has an impact upon a person's view of both themselves and on their relationships with others. It has been an important factor in the interactional dynamics

present in a therapeutic counseling relationship but has yet to be investigated in other social dyadic interactions such as marriage.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. What is the relationship between marital satisfaction and racial identity status in African American couples?
2. What is the relationship between marital satisfaction and age in older African American couples?
3. What is the relationship between marital satisfaction and length of marriage in older African American couples?
4. What is the relationship between marital satisfaction and income level in older African American couples?
5. What is the relationship between racial identity status and age in older African American couples?
6. What is the relationship between racial identity status and length of marriage in older African American couples?
7. What is the relationship between racial identity status and income level in older African American couples?
8. What is the difference between marital satisfaction by spousal gender in older African American couples?
9. What is the difference between racial identity status by spousal gender in older African American couples?

### Definition of Terms

African American is a term that includes both a descriptor of a person's Black racial characteristics and his or her historical makeup. To promote clarity within this research study, this word was used interchangeably with the term "Black." This usage as a proper noun is suggested by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (1994).

Afrocentric. This term refers to a world view that focuses on African or African American culture, beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Cohort denotes a "group of individuals born within the same time interval, usually five or ten years" (McManus, 1996).

Encounter status. This stage occurs when a Black individual experiences some event that highlights the racial inequities inherent in U.S. society. This experience serves as a catalyst to propel the individual through the racial identity process.

Ethnicity represents the cultural distinctiveness of a particular group from the majority population as a result of racial or national identity as well as a shared cultural history and values (Bengston & Morgan, 1987; Ho, 1987).

Eurocentric. This term refers to a world view that focuses on White or European culture, beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Identity is defined as the attitudes, behaviors, cognitions, and affects that comprise one's sense of self.

Immersion/emersion status occurs when African American individuals experience an overwhelming adherence to Black culture and reject the dominant culture. The end



portion of this stage is marked by a transition to a more dichotomous way of thinking about racial issues.

Internalization status. This stage is marked by experiencing African Americans as one's reference group while validating the experience of other racial groups including the dominant culture.

Life course perspective. This is a theoretical approach to studying families, that is "contextual, processual, and dynamic" (Bengston & Allen, 1993). This theoretical perspective combines the individual life span perspective with the family and societal levels of analyses to facilitate a more complete understanding of familial change.

Life cycle theory provides an explanation of individual and family change that assumes all families progress through certain stages/phases that are precipitated by some "marker" events such as marriage or retirement (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991).

Marital satisfaction. Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) defined this term as "the sense of well being, contentment and overall good feeling, including camaraderie, affection and safety" (p. 21) that occur in a relationship. They also purported that this definition is broad enough to permit multicultural comparisons as well as being salient to a variety of marital types.

Minority group. This term denotes a group of individuals who experience discrimination, negative stereotyping, powerlessness, and are often visibly different from the majority cultural group or "those members of a population group who are disadvantaged in terms of political, social and economic activities with regard to societal organization" (Wood, 1989).

Older adult is a concept that is constantly changing and being redefined. Both McManus (1996) and Myers (1990) noted how this has changed during the past 100 years. It can be based on chronological age, self-assessed age, functional age, or psychological age. For the purposes of this report it was 55 to be as inclusive as possible and considering the racial differences in life span (AARP, 1990; Hines, 1989).

Race specifies the self-assessed connection between an individual and a particular group that shares specific characteristics.

Preencounter status is marked by assimilation within the dominant culture and disengagement from the African American culture.

Racial identity development is a term utilized by theorists to describe a process of racial consciousness. Although a variety of terms have been used (e.g., Nigrescence, minority development model, etc.) to describe this dynamic process, the term racial identity development was utilized in this study.

### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters that describe the theory and practice for the study. Chapter 1 presented the problem that the study addressed, the need and purpose of the study, the pertinent theoretical frameworks, and the research questions. Definitions of pertinent terms concluded the chapter.

The remainder of the dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 contains a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 outlines the proposed research methodology. Descriptions of the relevant variables, population, sampling procedures, assessment instrumentation, research hypotheses, data collection procedures, and

projected data analyses are specified. Chapter 4 contains data analysis procedures and the results. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the research study, a discussion of the results, implications for clinical practice, and offers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the proposed study was to examine the relationship between racial identity attitudes and marital satisfaction in a population of older African American couples. There is little empirical research regarding the nature of intimate relationships among older persons of color. Whether this is due to the difficulty of recruiting participants or perhaps to some racist tendencies in scientific inquiry (Akbar, 1991; Azibo, 1992), the reality is that little has been written about this topic. Therefore, the literature review is divided into several sections.

Due to the limited references available regarding older African American couples, an overview of the experiences of Black couples and families is presented prior to the section on marital satisfaction literature. The next section includes a survey of the research literature describing older adults and their marital relationships. This seems to fall into the following two categories: (a) marital satisfaction in older age and throughout the married lifespan and (b) characteristics of long-term marriages. The literature that does focus upon the marital quality of African Americans is not necessarily inclusive of older participants and, therefore, is presented in a separate section.

The final section presents an overview of racial identity development theory as well as the literature that has examined its impact on dyadic relationships. Life cycle and

life course theory is also presented in an effort to provide a more contextual framework for understanding the proposed research study. In sum, the proposed research project attempted to focus on a heretofore previously neglected group--the marital relationships and racial identity status of older African American couples.

### The African American Marital and Family Experience

The experience of being African American varies for each individual in the United States, but there are underlying characteristics that are shared by people of African descent. Black (1996) described the following as their shared attributes: the culture and customs of Africa, the history of slavery, racism and discrimination, and the "victim system." She, as well as others (Coke & Twaite, 1995; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1996), believed that the enduring stoicism of African Americans within this unwelcoming system may be attributed to the support of family and the importance of kinship bonds, organized religion and spirituality, and the maintained culture of music, arts, and food. In particular, the role of social support has played an important part in the African legacy. During slavery, for example, the marital and family relationships of Black people served important "buffer" functions from the cruelty of slave owners (Coke & Twaite, 1995). This is the area where the proposed research project focused.

The current cohort of older Black adults is one that has experienced a vast array of sociohistorical events. Older African Americans have weathered legalized segregation and decreased employment and educational opportunities as well as national Black pride movements and the struggle for equal rights (Baker, 1994). The traditional African values of family and community are integral aspects of life for many members of the older

generation (Obudho, 1983). King and Griffin (1983) found that love relationships and intimacy are important for African Americans of all ages. The idea of reciprocity is important to many Black families because, historically, survival of the family was based upon cooperation. Blood- and nonblood-related family members all play important roles in the families' survival (McAdoo, 1993). The importance of the supportive functions of the church and of religion have also long been noted by researchers (Black, 1996; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Tate, 1983).

An early study (Jackson, 1972) illustrated some of the marital patterns of older African American adults in the early 1970s. She sampled a group of 135 older Black adults and surveyed their perceptions of spousal activity patterns (both leisure and work) and spousal dominance patterns. She discovered that matriarchy was not the norm for most couples. Most of the participants considered themselves egalitarian in interactions with their partners. There seemed to be an indication that there was more of a relationship between spousal dominance and social class, with men being more dominant in the lower class. This directly contradicted the previously held belief, by White researchers, that Black society is matriarchal. In sum, there were no significant differences by sex in these reported marital patterns.

One assumption that is often made in the study of African American aging is that of the frequency and intensity of discrimination as well as other oppressive conditions that are a fact of life in American society (Sue & Sue, 1990; Tate, 1983). The current cohort of older Black adults were raised in an era where discrimination was legally sanctioned and resulted in "blocked opportunities and an unequal share of this nation's

economic and social resources" (Tate, 1983, p. 97). Although the issues seems to be empirically unresolved, she reported that older African Americans often score higher on measures of life satisfaction than do older White adults.

Institutionalized racism has influenced how African American families have been studied. The Black families that have received the most empirical attention tend to be the families that are "the most economically depressed, most problematic African American family structures" (McAdoo, 1993, p. 113), and researchers have erroneously concluded that the outcomes were typical of all African American families, regardless of socioeconomic status and income (Akbar, 1991).

The long history of meaningful and important marital and familial connections for African Americans is thus well documented in the literature. What is lacking, however, is a focus on the level of satisfaction older adults have with their marriages. The interaction of racial identity attitudes is another area that has been overlooked in the lives of older Black adults.

#### Marital Satisfaction Literature

##### Marital Satisfaction of Older Adults

Satisfaction may be one of the most heavily researched areas of marital inquiry (Broman, 1988; Condie, 1989; Huyck, 1995; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992). The literature regarding the marital relationships of older adults has been compiled by Melton, Hersen, Van Sickle, and Van Hasselt (1995). Their literature review highlighted three areas that often impact the marital relationship: retirement, physical illness of a spouse, and sexual dysfunction. Their analysis indicated that satisfaction in long-term marriages

was not consistently demonstrated. This may be due, in part, to the wide disparity of ages, disregard for societal context, homogeneity of samples, varied educational and financial status as well as marriage length. The authors do report, however, that "harmony in later years is a function of the marital relationship across the lifespan of the couple" (p. 901).

Huyck (1995) provided a thorough overview of the area of marriage in later life. Her review of the literature illuminated the heterogeneity in older marital relationships as well as the continuity of relational style over time. Huyck did acknowledge that most studies include populations of older White adults. She highlighted the importance of certain variables such as ethnicity, social status, health, and impact of retirement on marital satisfaction. There was, however, no mention of the impact of race.

The curvilinear relationship between marital duration and marital status has been presumed to be the norm over the life course. A study by Orbach, House, Mero, and Webster (1996) that examined the points at which marital satisfaction begins to increase and the factors that might account for the change found that reduced responsibilities and commitments of later life were likely explanations for the change in satisfaction levels of men and women. The authors utilized post hoc data on 3,617 American individuals who were 25 years of age and older. They purported that African Americans and older adults (60+) were "sampled at twice the rate of nonblacks (sic) and persons under 60" (p. 164). The dependent variables were marital satisfaction and thoughts of divorce. Also examined were length of marriage, demographic variables (e.g., gender, race, and educational level), economic predictors, parental status, and employment status. The results indicated that



the curvilinear relationship between marriage length and satisfaction was again supported by the data. The authors found that marriages up to 20-24 years in length are associated with decreased marital satisfaction. After this point, the levels of marital satisfaction tend to steadily increase. They explained this change as being due to the decrease in parental, vocational, and financial stress that often occurs in later life. The authors also associated greater satisfaction with greater duration of marriage. However, this is based upon cross-sectional data which make it difficult to ascertain factors contributing to both marital longevity and satisfaction. The experiences of African Americans were not specifically addressed in the study.

Emotional behavior in long-term marriage was the focus of Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson's (1995) study. The research focused on middle-aged and older couples because previously researched marital interactions tended to focus on newly and young married couples. The authors observed 156 married couples in a variety of videotaped interactions. These interactions were coded in an effort to explore differences in emotional satisfaction and interaction between older and middle-aged couples. The authors found that older couples interacted in a more affectionate manner and with less negative emotion than middle aged couples. They based their findings on the notion that older couples attempt to utilize coping strategies that limit the amount of negative affect in their interactions, thus optimizing emotional experiences while decreasing the prevalence of negative emotional incidents. This study was preceded by Gottman and Krokoff's (1989) work which examined the interface of marital interaction and marital satisfaction.

In this longitudinal study, the investigators sought to distinguish happy from unhappy marriages as well as determining predictors of marital satisfaction. Their respondents were comprised of younger couples (mean ages were 46 and 44 years of age for men and women, respectively) who had been married for an average of 24 years. The couples were administered the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale as well as being observed interacting in a laboratory and preparing audiotapes of verbal interactions in their homes. The authors found that certain types of conflict may facilitate marital satisfaction over the long term as long as it is devoid of "defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal" (p. 51). Couples that avoid conflict may, over time, have less satisfied marriages. The results also seemed to indicate that there were some gender differences. Women who were positive and acquiescent reported satisfied marriages at the outset of the study; there was a tendency for satisfaction to decrease over time. Women who expressed anger and contempt during conflicts reported increased satisfaction over time, and men who were withdrawn or stubborn reported decreased marital happiness. Therefore, the affect and behaviors of men and women have the potential to greatly influence marital satisfaction.

Many older couples report high marital quality, but the degree of satisfaction throughout the different stages of later life is unknown. Rosalie Gilford (1984) studied contrasts in levels of interaction and sentiment as related to exchange theory within a sample of 318 married adults who ranged in age from 55 to 90. These individuals were placed into three age groups. The youngest old were 55-62, the middle group ranged from 63-69, and the oldest group ranged from 70-90. Her rationale for utilizing this design was

to "approximate a longitudinal design" (p. 326). The participants were assessed on the dimensions of positive interaction and negative sentiment. These dependent variables were analyzed in relation to independent social and personal variables that indicated there was a trend toward higher marital satisfaction in "young-old" couples with a decline in satisfaction for older couples. There was also a sex difference that indicated men were more satisfied than women, thus upholding similar finding in other studies. Gilford also found that satisfaction was more closely linked to the personality of spouses as opposed to socioeconomic status. The finding that quality differs as a result of age group, and the potential for dissatisfaction, is a significant finding that has implications for mental health practitioners.

In another attempt to look at differences in marital satisfaction by older age group, Herman's (1994) work was based on the findings of the literature that indicated three different trajectories for marital satisfaction in older age. Different research projects have supported these varying views that marital satisfaction can either increase, decrease, or remain constant in later life. The goal of his work was to identify changes in the various substages of later life (e.g., for the "young-old" vs. the "old-old"). The study utilized the responses of 168 older (i.e., 55-68 years old) married people on the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Questionnaire and a demographics sheet. Herman found no significant age-related differences in overall marital satisfaction. He deduced from his data that older married people, in any cohort, are no more or no less satisfied at this point in time than any other. Herman did caution against overgeneralization based upon the cross-sectional nature of

the study. An important implication of his work is that mental health professionals should encourage the few elderly couples who do experience marital dissatisfaction to pursue professional intervention.

Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and marital support among older couples. They hypothesized that couples would perceive reciprocity of social support as being greater than it really was and that marital satisfaction would be related with perceived reciprocity of support and that this would have greater significance for the wives. To test their hunches, they interviewed 69 couples who had a mean age of 74 years. The marriages ranged from 2 to 64 years with a mean of 41 years together. The marital dyads were interviewed in their homes and asked varying questions assessing perception of marital support as well as marital satisfaction. Health status was also discussed. The authors found that spouses did perceive reciprocity of social support as being greater than it was in actuality but that this perception did not necessarily relate to marital satisfaction. The research findings also bore out their postulation that perceptions of social support were more important for wives and impacted their reported marital satisfaction.

In an effort to develop a taxonomy of long-term marital types that incorporated levels of marital satisfaction, Weishauss and Field (1988) utilized post hoc data from a sample of 17 older couples who were participants in the longitudinal Berkeley Older Generation Study. In-depth interviews that had been conducted over a period of 50+ years were reviewed to generate the "dynamic" models of long-term marriage that encompassed both a temporal aspect as well as the characteristics of the relationship.

The categories they devised are as follows: (a) Stable/positive marriages are unions that are perceived as being stable over time and characterized by high satisfaction throughout the marriage; (b) stable/neutral couples do not experience moderate satisfaction that has been consistently maintained; (c) stable/negative marriages are perceived as being low in satisfaction during the course of the marriage; (d) curvilinear relationships demonstrate the commonly found pattern of marriages that begin with high satisfaction, dip to a low point during childrearing years, and increase during later years of marriage; (e) continuous decline is described as a pattern of moderate to low satisfaction at the relationship's inception with a steady decrease over time; and (f) continuous increase couples are those who, theoretically, experience moderate satisfaction that consistently increases over time. In this admittedly small sample, the authors found that 75% of the couples could be classified as either the stable/positive or curvilinear types.

Factors contributing to the stability and satisfaction in long-term marriages are the subject of Lauer, Lauer, and Kerr's (1990) research. They attempted to look at the variables that contributed to maintenance of the relationship as opposed to factors that predicted disruption. The authors recruited 100 married couples who had been married from 45 to 64 years and administered the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). They also surveyed these respondents for their attitudes toward their spouse as well as requesting participants' perceptions of factors which had contributed to marital longevity. Lauer, Lauer, and Kerr found that 91.5% of the participants indicated they were "happy, very happy, or extremely happy" with their marriages. The DAS indicated high levels of agreement between spouses and the attitudes toward spouses were highly positive. The

factors that were identified as being critical toward the maintenance of the marriage were (a) being with someone they liked, (b) commitment, (c) humor, and (d) agreement. The authors posited that the shared spousal perceptions of critical variables contributed to the successes of these marriages. The authors did note that their findings may not be generalizable to populations that are impoverished or unhealthy.

Critical components of the long-term marriage were the subject of two recent studies (Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992). The study by Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) set out to investigate the key factors of satisfying long-term marriages. They conducted a pilot study that consisted of 20 couples who had been married for 25 or more years. The sample was comprised of relatively affluent, White respondents. They reported that good problem-solving skills, trust, commitment, good communication, shared interests and activities, and love to be important components of their long-term marriages. The authors acknowledged the limitations of the small and homogenous sample but argued that further research is necessary to understand the nature of longevity in relationships. There are also significant clinical implications for therapists working with these populations.

The more recent study (Kaslow & Robison, 1996) hypothesized that there is a certain "cluster" of characteristics that facilitate the maintenance of marriage for couples married 25 or more years. Fifty-seven couples, mean age 56.8, who had been married from 25 to 46 years were the sample for this project. Each couple received five assessment instruments that included a sociodemographic data sheet, a questionnaire that assessed problem-solving strategies, a problem-rating list, a questionnaire regarding the

couples' perceptions of ingredients of marital satisfaction, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Based upon their DAS scores, 29 respondent couples scored in the "satisfied" range, 15 couples scored in the "midrange," and the remaining 13 couples were classified as "dissatisfied." A great deal of descriptive data were reported; however, there was little empirical connection between the DAS scores and the other data generated by each couple. The study focused on the qualities that the couples reported as being salient to the maintenance of marriage over time. Commitment to the relationship, respect, trust, support, shared religious beliefs, shared interests, and love were among the most important qualities reported by the respondents.

Marital quality in later life was the subject of Dickson's (1995) work. She reported on long-term marriages of older couples and also speculated as to the reasons that these couples remain together. This author found that there were three basic characteristics of perceived satisfactory long-term marriages. These characteristics were respect for one another, agreement on levels of intimacy, and a shared perception of their life together. On the other hand, unhappy couples who remained together into older age reported that a high level of commitment to the relationship, decreased viability of divorce as an option, and the experience of a high level of emotional distance. Dickson stated that couples who experience satisfactory marriages in early years are more likely to report high levels of marital satisfaction in later life.

Marital satisfaction has often been studied in conjunction with specific events in the lives of older adults such as retirement or spousal disability or illness. The relatively small number of outcome research studies on the impact of retirement upon later-life

marriages represents a variety of views. Various researchers have found retirement to have either no effect on marriage (Lee & Shehan, 1989; Matthews & Brown, 1987) or slight positive (Gilford, 1984) or negative effects (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991; Pina & Bengtson, 1995). The extant literature seems to indicate that marital history is the best indicator of satisfaction after retirement.

### Marital Satisfaction in African American Families

There are limited data regarding the marital satisfaction of Black couples (Ball & Robbins, 1986; Broman, 1988) and few data regarding older couples. This section presents some of the relevant findings about the marital satisfaction and life satisfaction of African American adults that may be used to hypothesize about the relationships of older Black couples.

McAdoo (1993) cited work by Zollar and Williams (1987) that found married African Americans to be more satisfied with their lives than those who were unmarried. This supports Coke and Twaike's (1995) postulation that marriage is important for Black Americans despite a decline in the statistics of intact marriages of older couples (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). McAdoo (1993) also postulated that White and Black families may not be so very different. His research in the area of marital satisfaction seemed to indicate that patterns of marital satisfaction for Black couples resemble those of White couples.

In a study of marital quality over the life course, Adelman, Chadwick, and Baerger (1996) utilized post hoc data that included responses from 1,430 Black and White married adults in their first marriage. The study included data provided by 333 Black



participants. Marital quality over the life course showed the typical curvilinear pattern, but the curve for marital interdependence starts low and gradually increases over time. Although there were no significant differences in marital quality for Black and White adults, the authors reported that the African American individuals indicated lower positive marital quality and higher negative marital quality than White participants. The variables that the authors suspected would account for ethnic group differences in marital quality (e.g., kin relationships and status inequality) did not eliminate the intergroup differences. The authors stated that they were striving to test the generalizability of the "typical" curvilinear pattern of marital satisfaction over the life course to African Americans. The comparison of Black participants to the White participants may have implications that responses of African Americans are somehow "less than" those of Whites (Azibo, 1992; Stanford & Yee, 1991). The argument is once again made for studying the lives of African American people in relation to themselves instead of to the dominant culture.

A large scale study that utilized both post hoc data from the National Survey of Black Americans and focus groups examined various correlates of marriage and romantic involvement for 581 older Black adults (Tucker, Taylor, & Mitchell-Kernan, 1993). Thirty-nine percent of the participants were currently married, and 16.5% were involved in romantic relationships. The remaining individuals were divided by those who desired romantic involvement and those who did not. The authors discovered that the independent variables of age, gender, education, income level, and place of residence were predictors of marital or romantic involvement status of older Black adults. For example,

as the age of individuals increased, their likelihood of being married decreased. This seems to be the case particularly for Black women as there is a high proportion of unmarried older women. This may be related to the lower life expectancies for Black men. Rural inhabitants were more likely to be married than city dwellers as were the younger respondents in the sample. The study also indicated a positive relationship between marital status and quality of life for older Black adults.

In another study, Dennis and Williams (1984) found a significant relationship between older Black adults' financial and health satisfaction and their life satisfaction levels. There was a stronger correlation for women than for men. Although this was a study that focused on global life satisfaction as opposed to marital satisfaction, the connection between finances and satisfaction is highlighted as are gender differences.

Marriage and parenthood were the focus of Broman's (1988) study. He hypothesized that marital and parenting status had significant impact on life satisfaction for Black couples. He utilized post hoc data from the National Survey of Black Americans and derived a sample of 2,107 interview responses from a national cross section of the adult African American population in 1979-1980. Of this sample, 732 interviews were completed with African Americans who were 50 or older. Life satisfaction and family satisfaction were measured. The analyses indicated that older people have higher levels of satisfaction as well as those with less education and who live in the rural South. Broman also found that "divorced and separated blacks [sic] have lower levels of life satisfaction than persons in other marital status categories" (p. 47).

Therefore, the important predictors of satisfaction appeared to be the interaction of marital status with age, education, and rural residence.

Ball and Robbins (1986), on the other hand, found that marital status was an important indicator of life satisfaction for men only. Their study examined the relationship between marital status and global life satisfaction in a sample of 373 Black women and 253 Black men aged 18 and older. Of this sample, 135 participants were aged 50 and older. The authors hypothesized that there would be differences in life satisfaction levels of persons with different marital statuses. They found that married Black men were the least satisfied persons of any category. When controls for age, social participation, health, adjusted income, and education were added, the married men were significantly less satisfied than the divorced, separated, or widowed men. For women, widows had the highest mean levels of life satisfaction, followed by the divorced and then the married. Older women, as a group, appeared to be more satisfied than younger women. Marriage, on the whole, was not associated with high levels of satisfaction in this study.

Rutledge (1983) closely examined the husband and wife relationships of 252 African American married couples who ranged in age from 25-60. There were also four women included in the study who were not married. The exploratory research study attempted to describe various aspects of the marital relationship such as marital interaction, opportunity of fulfilling marital interaction goals, and marital happiness. Rutledge found that, in her sample, marital interaction goals were highly important to both husbands and wives. Barring the goals of decision making, handling disagreements,

and sex, most interactional goals were slightly more important for the women. Although the marital interaction goals were important for the study participants, their opportunities to achieve these goals were less available. Husbands seemed to have a higher likelihood of fulfilling their marital interaction goals than were the wives, but there was some discrepancy between what was important to their marriage and their abilities to fulfill the goals. The marital satisfaction measures indicated that the majority of men and women expressed satisfaction on all of the items except those relating to anger and spousal irritation. However, the author pointed out that levels of dissatisfaction were higher for women than for men which supported previous research (Gilford, 1984).

The African American experience was the focus of McAdoo's (1993) research on family power and marital satisfaction. He found that 97% of his participants reported satisfaction with their spouses. There were no significant gender differences in decision-making scores. Although his sample was small, the results were important in that they emphasized the participants' satisfaction with their partners and with themselves. Although this study did not specifically focus on older adults, the sample of solely African American couples is important in delineating the cultural experiences and realities that are specific to this racial group.

A longitudinal study by Timmer, Veroff, and Hatchett (1996) illustrated the relationships between levels of in-law and family-of-origin interactions on marital happiness. Although the sample involved was comprised of young newlyweds, the substantial focus on the experience of the 115 Black couples is significant. The investigators also utilized a life course perspective to undergird their hypotheses that

Black couples' marital happiness will be influenced by specific factors relative to their racial group membership and history such as their level of family interaction, economic status as well as family structure. They found that marital adjustment for the Black couples was influenced by level of closeness to spousal in-laws (especially husbands' families) but not an intact family background.

The experience of internalized racism on marital satisfaction is the focus of Taylor's 1992 study. He hypothesized that internalized racism is inversely related to levels of marital satisfaction and the findings minimally support it. Taylor made the point that there are virtually no studies that link the experience of racism, or its impact, to marital satisfaction. The sample consisted of 96 Black married couples in a Northeastern city. The Locke-Wallace was utilized to assess marital satisfaction levels, and the Nadanolitization Inventory (NAD) measured levels of internalized racism. The results indicated that internalized racism predicted levels of marital satisfaction for the husbands. That is, men who reported higher levels of racism reported decreased levels of marital satisfaction. Interestingly, when the researcher controlled for socioeconomic status, the influence of internalized racism became nonsignificant. The correlation between husbands and wives was moderate (.56). The marital satisfaction of husbands and wives was not affected by their spouse's level of internalized racism.

#### Summary of Marital Satisfaction Literature

It would seem that the literature indicates that older married adults rate themselves as quite satisfied in their relationships. There appears to be an increase in satisfaction over the marital life cycle which is thought to be due to the decrease in roles and

responsibilities. Some characteristics of satisfied marriages are thought to be commitment, trust, and love. However, it is also possible that unhappy couples may not maintain marriage into later life or, more simply, may not choose to partake in studies of marital satisfaction. The independent variables that have been found to have an impact on older couples' marital satisfaction are age (Gilford, 1984), financial status (Huyck, 1995), educational level (Melton et al., 1995), length of marriage (Orbuch et al., 1996), and sex (Gilford, 1984; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

The research findings that have been presented seem to indicate that the incidence of marriages for African American couples are predicted by the variables of age, gender, educational and income levels, and residential area and positively correlated with high quality of life for older adults (Tucker et al., 1993). Gender seems to have an impact upon men and women's perception of marital satisfaction (Ball & Robbins, 1986; Rutledge, 1983; Taylor, 1992) although it is unclear whether men or women are the most dissatisfied. Financial status also had an impact on some studies' participants (Dennis & Williams, 1984; Timmer et al., 1996). The older dyads have also been found to be more satisfied than younger couples (Ball & Robbins, 1986).

The present study focuses on the variables of length of marriage, income level, age, and gender as these items appear to have been significant in studies that focused on older couples as well as African American couples.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

#### Life Cycle Theory

The developmental family life cycle model attempts to explain changes in structure and role over the course of time (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). It assumes that most families progress through certain stages that are marked by specific events such as birth, marriage, and death. It is hypothesized that the couple or family will need to adapt to these changes in order to proceed developmentally through the life cycle (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991).

This theory has also undergone a great deal of revision since its inception. Family life cycle theory had been criticized for its original postulation that there is a “correct” way in which to proceed through the stages of development (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). The theory often presumed to explain “normal” family development. It also focused on women’s role of caregiver and men’s relationships to the world of work. Recent reformulations have noted the importance of diversity across family units. Divorce, race, and ethnicity have been included within the life cycle perspective (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Bengston and Allen (1993) made the point that this theory has conceptual merit in understanding family organization and transition.

Walsh (1989) described the later stages of the family life cycle. She purported that later life holds many challenges and joys for older adults. The need for adaptability to changing physical health, financial resources, and social support structures is critical as older adults face developmental changes. Hines (1989) discussed the differences that some older Black families face in this life cycle context. She highlighted the reality that

many older African American couples do not experience the “empty nest” but continue to function actively as parents and grandparents in multigenerational households.

Mathis and Tanner (1991) studied cohesion, adaptability, and satisfaction of family systems in later life. The study was undertaken to ascertain if there are empirical differences between family adaptability and cohesion across the life cycle. There was also the need to focus on later life and standardize assessment instruments (i.e., FACES III) that would measure the experience of older age. The participants were 47 White older couples who were members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). They were administered the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III) and the Family Satisfaction Scale. The authors found that, as expected, family satisfaction increased later in the life cycle. Older families also seemed to share leadership and had role flexibility. They also found that the family levels of adaptability were so high as to be considered “unhealthy” according to the Circumplex Model. The high adaptability may have been related to the number of changes that occur to older families over the course of the life cycle.

Family life cycle theory is helpful as a tool for providing context to the study. The theory provides a framework by which the family structure of older African Americans can be understood with respect to culturally relevant roles, structure, and function.

### Life Course Perspective

The life course perspective has much in common with racial identity development theory as evidenced in the social gerontological literature. The developmental, contextual,



and temporal nature of both theories provides a solid base from which to hypothesize about the nature of marriage for older African American couples.

The life course perspective is an oft-utilized framework for understanding aging (Adelmann et al., 1996; Barresi, 1987; Marshall, 1996; Uhlenberg & Miner, 1996) within a societal context. It developed from a variety of disciplines to incorporate sociological, psychological, and family development theories. Life course theory seeks to incorporate perspectives of the individual, the family, and the greater social climate in an effort to study the effects of their interactions over time (Bengston & Allen, 1993). The acknowledgment of not only an individual's personal history but that of his or her cohort or in this case, his or her racial group, is critical to understanding the aging process. Dilworth-Anderson et al. (1993) stated, in fact, that the life course perspective is only one of three theoretical perspectives on the family that really holds promise for inclusion of cultural relevance. The life course perspective has also been presumed to be a "more welcoming framework" (Adelmann et al., 1996, p. 364) for study of the marital quality of Black adults over the life course.

Bengston and Allen (1993) proposed that there exist four basic assumptions that underpin the life course perspective. The assumptions include the following concepts: a temporal context, social context, dynamic developmental perspective, and heterogeneity. Time is an important factor in the conception of the life course as individual time interfaces with historical time. For example, this research project sought to examine the experience of *older* Black persons (individual time) in the 1990s (historical time). The results, therefore, are specific, or generalizable, only to this specific cohort of individuals.

The social context in which the older couples live, and have lived, is also purported to affect their sense of themselves as an individual, part of a couple, and as part of the African American racial group in the United States. The life course also encompasses a dynamic process of change over time and involves a look at "the big picture" as opposed to thin, cross-sectional slices. Finally, the concept of heterogeneity is inclusive and all-encompassing of various people and lifestyles. This idea, in particular, makes the life course an ideal framework for scientists and practitioners who seek to understand racial and ethnic differences in families (Adelmann et al., 1996; Dilworth-Anderson et al., 1993).

Baker (1994) made the important point of emphasizing a life course perspective as well as a biopsychosocial context when examining the lives of older African Americans. This author exhorts mental health professionals to be highly aware of the events that older Black adults have faced during their lifetimes and the effects these experiences may have upon their perceptions of themselves or of their relationships with others.

Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, and Bengtson (1991) also highlighted the interrelatedness of gerontological issues and racial diversity with the life course perspective. They pointed out the salience of the life course perspective in understanding the lives of older adults of color because of its themes of family interdependence, temporal context, and historical perspective. They postulated that a life course perspective enhances the study of "ethnic minority" older adults because it provides a culturally sensitive framework for the examination of life course issues that incorporates the specific experiences of not only the group as a whole but also that of individuals, couples, and families.

Luborsky and Rubinstein (1987) focused on the impact of ethnicity upon the life course but parallels to racial identity development may be seen. For example, they contended that past experiences greatly influence one's current ethnic identity. This seems strikingly similar to the notion of the effect of "encounter" experiences upon one's racial identity. Racial identity is also a life experience that constantly impact one's sense of self and reference group. The authors posited that the meaning of ethnicity and its resultant identity is influenced by life span development and family history, historical setting and cohort experiences, situational factors, and the recursive nature of understanding one's ethnicity.

The life course, in effect, provides the setting in which racial identity development can take place. It acknowledges the specific history of African American people and incorporates it into their sense of individual and group experiences.

### Racial Identity Development

How people think about themselves and their place in the world, or identity, is a cornerstone of both psychological and sociological research. Gatz and Cotton (1994) stated that human beings define themselves on two dimensions, the social and the personal. They stated that the social definition of self is shaped by membership in various social groups and the personal dimension is the sum of all individually distinctive characteristics (i.e., physical, psychological, and relational). For persons of color, these definitions of identity would also comprise both their own and their racial group's perceptions of themselves.

The social changes that occurred in the late 1960s had an impact upon the research that was being conducted in the latter part of the decade and well into the 1970s (Helms, 1989). A number of social scientists began investigating the development of racial identity in persons of color. Although identity development has only come under this scientific scrutiny during the past 25 years, examples from African American literature point to the veracity of the claims that people of color have long struggled with their sense of themselves within American society (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991).

Typologies and stage theories were posited by a number of researchers (Atkinson et al., 1989; Cross, 1971; Vontress, 1971). Stage theories that focused on racial identity development became popular and well researched in this area. William Cross's (1971) early work on what he termed "nigrescence," or the "process of becoming psychologically 'Black,' [and] refers to the attitudinal and behavioral changes associated with Blacks' identification with the concept of Black empowerment" (Jenkins, 1995, p. 177) has developed into one of the most widely utilized and researched frameworks in this area (Ramseur, 1989). This model has been revised and updated (Cross, 1995; Cross et al., 1991; Helms, 1993; Parham, 1989a, 1989b) and, using the more current title "Racial Identity Development Model," is utilized as one the primary theoretical bases in this research project.

Racial identity development is purported to be a dynamic process that Black individuals experience over the course of their lifetime (Helms, 1993 ; Parham, 1989a, 1989b). African Americans are constantly faced with racial issues in this society, and the racial identity development model attempts to explain the process of experiencing their

"Blackness" and the effect this experience has on their view of themselves and the world (Cross et al., 1991). The task of constructing a positive sense of self and own racial group within a racist society is critical. Jenkins (1995) pointed out that progression through the racial identity statuses does not affect the person's intrinsic personality features but, instead, changes the individual's racial priorities. The dynamic model incorporates five stages or, as Helms (1994, 1995) has redefined them, statuses which incorporate beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to own and other racial group membership (Helms, 1984).

Status seems to be a more appropriate terminology as it suggests that the distinct "periods" outlined within the model are permeable and signify a dynamic process for individuals. Helms (1995) stated that "an individual may exhibit attitudes behaviors, and emotions reflective of more than one stage . . . [and] *stage* seems to imply a static place or condition that the person "reaches" rather than the dynamic interplay between cognitive and emotional processes that racial identity models purport to address" (p. 183). Some theorists also view each stage/status as an identity, or world view, in its own right (Cross et al., 1991).

The statuses are not always mutually exclusive or discrete. It is theorized that individuals progress through these "statuses" during the course of their lifetimes with the potential of cycling and recycling through any of the statuses at any given time (Parham, 1989a). In other words, once a person has experienced one of the statuses, it "is always potentially present, although the ego as a whole is always potentially changing in response to new (racial) societal messages. Thus, earlier modes of coping can influence

people even after they think that they have resolved their racial identity issues" (Helms, 1994, p. 302). As a person encounters different developmental tasks that are associated with various life cycle events (e.g., marriage, childbirth), these events may function as catalysts for rethinking values, attitudes, and behaviors (Cross et al., 1991). This process continually marks the individual's journey of understanding and accepting his/her race as an integral part of who he/she is.

The statuses are presented in order of their complexity, and the higher stages indicate greater development or maturity (Helms, 1994). Status 1 (or Stage 1) is that of "Pre-Encounter." In Cross's original model (1971) the focus was on assimilation of the majority culture. It was believed that people who experienced Status 1 participated in the denigration of African American heritage and embraced the European American culture. Cross (1995) has since modified this perspective to provide a more logical explanation of the first status. He explained that individuals, at this point, do not necessarily experience self or group hatred but, perhaps, subscribe to a more Eurocentric orientation out of ignorance or fear. Cross termed the issue of race for these people as being "low salience." Jenkins (1995) further clarified this point with the explanation that African Americans who are in the Pre-Encounter status give a higher priority to being an "American" rather than to being "Black." These people tend to accept the status quo view of their race.

Status, or stage, 2 is the "Encounter" where the person has an experience that serves to jolt him or her out of the previous state of non-Afrocentric orientation. Many examples from Black literature often accompany descriptions of the encounter experiences (i.e., W.E.B. Dubois, Malcolm X) of well-known African Americans. The

descriptions are eloquent in their shock to the individual's sense of self. Cross (1995) stated that although Black people are frequently faced with racist situations, until they personalize the meaning of these "encounters," their world views will continue to be unchallenged. When a person does experience a racial "epiphany," he or she may experience any number of differing emotions such as anger, depression, or sadness. The variety of feelings that accompany this experience indicate the magnitude of the encounter event and its meaning to the individual. In effect, the individual experiences and personalizes a particular "trigger" event and then, in turn, reinterprets the world from the new perspective (Cross et al., 1991).

The third status is that of "Immersion/Emersion." It is likened to a transition between lack of awareness of one's racial identity and a more global understanding of self and other racial groups. The early portion, "Immersion," is marked by the individual's adherence to Black culture and his or her eschewing of the White culture (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1993). The intense feelings of racial pride are often accompanied by anger or aggression toward the majority culture and its members, as well as to one's own previous part in maintaining the status quo of racism. Although the individual becomes very involved with anything related to Black culture, he or she, ironically, may become very judgmental of those who they perceive as not being "Black enough."

The end status of "Emersion" signifies the person of color's emergence from this stage to a more integrated, and less dichotomous, way of thinking. The ability to examine more critically both the strengths and weaknesses of this new identity status emerge (Jenkins, 1995).

The intensity of emotions abates, somewhat, and the individual gains a more balanced perspective to evaluate racial issues. Cross (1995), in his update of the statuses/stages, also pointed out that the experience of "Immersion/Emersion" can result in a person regressing to the earlier Pre-Encounter status or fixation at Status 3. Either option does not allow for the person to experience a more integrated sense of self as a person of color in White world.

"Internalization" is the fourth status. It signifies resolution of the inner turmoil of defining oneself as a person of color in a racist society. Being African American is now seen as impacting upon every part of one's life experience (e.g., social roles, spirituality). One's world view and sense of self have also made a shift to incorporate Helms' (1993) statement that "in developing a stable Black identity the individual can face the world from a position of personal strength, [and] it now becomes possible to renegotiate one's positions with respect to Whites and White society" (p. 29). Therefore, an individual who experiences this state has African Americans as his or her primary reference group, but he or she is more open to the experiences of other racial groups including that of the dominant (White) culture.

The final status, "Internalization-Commitment," was proposed in Cross' (1971) original model. He maintained that the fifth status is closely related to the fourth and is differentiated by a enduring interest and commitment to transforming one's "personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action" (p. 121) for the racial group as a whole (Cross, 1995). More recently, Helms (1993, 1995) has raised questions about the viability of this status as separate and distinct from the previous one. She argues that "Internalization-



Commitment" has not been empirically separated, or operationally defined, as being distinct from the fourth status. As a result, she collapses Status Four and Five and utilizes the first four statuses as descriptors in her empirical research.

Parham's (1989a, 1989b) recent contributions also posited alternatives to strict linear progression through the developmental sequence. He asserted that resolution of identity development is not necessarily in a linear fashion that ends with Internalization. Stagnation is possible at any point in the developmental process as is recycling through the racial identity statuses (Cross et al., 1991).

Helms' (1984) earlier work examined the effects of race on the counseling dyad. She presented her interactive model of counseling, which is based on the assumption that all individuals struggle with racial consciousness development, that investigates cross- and same-race therapeutic interactions. She examined Black dyads, White dyads, and mixed race dyads and proceeded to describe possible interactional outcomes based upon both client and counselor racial identity status. Helms used the following terms to describe the nature of the counseling relationship based upon the status of the participants: parallel, crossed, progressive, and regressive. Parallel indicates that counselor and client share the same identity, crossed refers to the fact that each holds opposing attitudes about race, progressive indicates that therapist is further along in the identity development process, and regressive refers to the client being ahead of the counselor in the identity development process.

Helms (1984) provided support from her earlier research (Parham & Helms, 1981) that indicated that Black students with a preencounter identity prefer White therapists

and African American students who identify with the Immersion status tend to prefer African American counselors. Helms pointed out that people “at different stages of racial consciousness probably enter counseling relationships with different attitudinal and behavioral predispositions” (p. 156), and it could be extrapolated further to ask the following question: Is this true for intimate marital relationships?

Helms (1993) offered a descriptive model of social interaction based upon her counseling framework. Although she admitted there is no empirical evidence to support her extrapolations, she asked salient questions regarding the social interaction between individuals engaged in the identity development process. Helms stated that the parallel, crossed, progressive, and regressive interactional styles that she identified in counseling relationships may also be applicable to other types of social interactions such as parents and children and, more importantly for this study, husbands and wives. She suggested that the more powerful partner replace the “counselor” mode in her interactional model and that the less powerful partner replace the “client” mode. Thus, the descriptions of the interactions would remain much the same. Helms did provide speculation on the relationship types as a function of various racial combinations of the partners, but for this study, the most salient pairing would be that of Black dyads (see Figure 1).

As illustrated, the types of dyads are outlined as are the relationship types between partners with similar or dissimilar racial identity status. Although it may, at times, be difficult to determine who is the more powerful partner within a marriage, the framework may serve as a useful tool for predicting marital interactions and satisfaction based upon racial identity development. Helms (1993) encouraged professionals in the

Table 1

Summary of Relationship Types Based Upon Participants' Racial Identity Status (A modified version of Helms' 1993 Model)

Dyad Type	Powerful Partner's Racial Identity Status	Less Powerful Partner's Racial Identity Status	General Theme
<b>Parallel</b>	1. Preencounter 2. Encounter 3. Immersion 4. Internalization	1. Preencounter 2. Encounter 3. Immersion 4. Internalization	Stable, placid and harmonious dyads. Participants feel supported and understood. Racial attitudes are not apt to change.
<b>Progressive</b>	1. Encounter, Immersion or Internalization 2. Immersion, Internalization 3. Internalization	1. Preencounter 2. Encounter 3. Immersion	Some tension in relationship due to racial issues. The greater the distance between statuses, the more tension. Greatest growth occurs because participants' role expectations are not violated.
<b>Regressive</b>	1. Preencounter 2. Encounter 3. Immersion	1. Encounter, Immersion, Internalization 2. Immersion, Internalization 3. Internalization	Conflicted relationships are marked by fights about racial issues. The greater the difference between partners' identity status, the greater the conflicts. Relationships can be "dysfunctional" because the participants' growth is stifled.
<b>Crossed</b>	1. Preencounter	2. Immersion	Most conflicted relationship type. Characterized by fear, disharmony and conflict. Not like to be growth producing.

field to continue to explore this area as “empirical investigations of dyadic relationships rarely focus on racial adjustment as a significant aspect of the relationship (p. 185).

The literature that examines the influence of racial identity attitudes on social interactions provides a basis for extrapolating to the proposed study. Richardson and Helms (1994) studied Black men’s racial identity attitudes relative to their perceptions of “parallel” counseling dyads. The racial identity attitudes of 52 Black male college students were assessed, and then the participants evaluated counseling dyads that were comprised of a Black client and a White counselor. The parallel dyads engaged in a discussion of race-oriented issues. The students then completed a counselor rating form, cross-cultural counseling inventory, and voice quality questionnaire. The authors found that higher scores on the Encounter subscale seemed to correlate with negative emotional reactions to the White male counselor within the parallel dyads. Results of this study seemed to indicate that racial identity attitudes predicted the participants’ emotional reactions to the “counselor” although it was unclear if cognitive reactions were similarly predicted.

Carter and Helms (1992) sought to confirm their hypothesis that different combinations of racial identity attitudes of counselors and clients result in different types of therapeutic relationships. While race itself was not predicted to influence the interpersonal interaction, the combination of attitudes was purported to be the more significant factor. They suggested that progressive relationships may be described as empathic, growth-inducing and accepting. Regressive relationships, on the other hand, are likely to be conflictual or anxiety ridden for both participants. Parallel relationships are

hypothesized to be supportive yet not overtly challenging while crossed relationships may be the least productive of all. The exploratory study involved 33 pairs of mental health workers who attended cross-cultural training workshops. The participants were randomly assigned to various types of racial pairings (e.g., Black-Black, White-White, Black-White). Each person completed either the Racial Identity Attitude Scale or the White Racial Identity Attitudes Inventory. The dyads were then instructed discuss a racial experience. They then rated the interaction with a variety of session evaluation measures. Upon completion of the study, the pairs were classified as a particular relationship type based upon the results of their racial identity attitude scale scores. The results indicated that for parallel dyads the interactions were characterized as placid, smooth, and positive. Progressive pairings seemed to result in interactions between "counselors" and "clients" that were hopeful, supportive, and nonconflictual. Participants indicated that the focus of the session seemed to be on the "client" and his or her emotions and cognitions. In this study, the regressive dyads indicated that there was some hostility in the interactions. There were no dyads that were defined as crossed.

Carter's (1988) study focused upon the relationship between racial identity attitudes and social class in a group of 174 Black college students. The participants completed the Racial Identity Attitude Scale as well as questions regarding socioeconomic status variables. Carter found that socioeconomic status variables did not predict racial identity attitudes in this study. He noted that this finding was unexpected in light of the common assumption that, in the social sciences, socioeconomic status is often stated as a determinant of Black identity.

In their 1987 study, Carter and Helms sought to determine if there was a relationship between Afrocentric cultural values and racial identity attitudes in a sample of 174 Black college students. Racial identity attitudes seemed to predict three of the five measured Afrocentric values. There were also significant differences in participant responses by gender. Although this study had at its heart a different focus than the proposed project, it highlighted the complexity of cultural values in the Black community. The authors pointed out a critical implication for therapy practice when they said, "Racial identity attitudes and sex may be important places to begin the search for ways to see the world through the client's eyes" (p. 194).

Racial identity development, or more specifically nigrescence, has been extensively tested in relation to individual development and within a counseling setting. However, there has been little focus on populations outside of the college campus. As gerontology has long acknowledged, the individual continues to develop and mature past young adulthood. Parham (1989a) called for an increase in research in other developmental spheres to test the validity of the theory. "A Black person's frame of reference is potentially influenced by his or her life stage and the developmental tasks associated with that period of life" (p. 196), and, therefore, the utility of the model must be examined with respect to all stages of the life course. Identity development will be qualitatively different depending upon life cycle status. He firmly supported the view that racial identity development continues long past late adolescence and early adulthood as had been previously presented (Parham, 1989b).

Parham (1989a, 1989b) hypothesized the differences in racial identity based upon life cycle process. He described middle adulthood as having a theme of institutionalization. By this, he noted the affiliation with specific institutions in middle adulthood (e.g., place of employment, church, civic organization) and suggested that this would shape how one would experience each of the identity statuses. For older adults, a theme of reflection in later life is also presented. This acknowledges various assumptions related to older age (i.e., life review, adjustment to loss, and eventual mortality) and their interface with the various racial identity statuses. For older African American adults experiencing preencounter identity, Parham purported that they would measure their life satisfaction or accomplishment based upon White ideals. That is, they might attribute their successes and failures solely to their own efforts. They may also try to encourage younger people to assimilate the dominant culture.

The encounter status may be triggered by the same life review process, but in this case, the older adult feels anger or guilt regarding her or his adherence to the mores of the dominant culture. The intensity of the encounter experience will in no way be decreased as a function of the individual's age. The immersion-emersion racial identity status may be marked by a strong urge to completely be absorbed into the African American culture. Success and failure in life might be attributed solely to racism. The older adult may exhort younger Black people to have pride in their racial heritage and eschew White culture. The older adult who experiences the internalization identity status may have a sense of satisfaction with her or his life. This status is characterized by less anxiety and by more peace. She or he may attempt to impart their knowledge to younger people of all races

while still maintaining a strong African American identity. Parham (1989b) called to the helping professions to help empirically support his descriptive addition to the racial identity development theory.

These theoretical advances are very important in the conceptualization of the racial identity development model. He purported that racial identity is constantly being challenged, reshaped, and transformed over one's life span. Parham thus offered an expansion of Cross' original nigrescence model to incorporate the notion that continuously changing racial identity is also an inherent need in African American persons. It is important for both clinicians and researchers to know how a person is influenced by his/her race in later life.

#### Summary of Theoretical Perspectives

The relationship of each assumption in the life course theory to the rationale for examining the impact of racial identity development on marital satisfaction in older African American couples becomes clear. The idea that the dimension of time affects individuals and families may also be seen in the temporal setting in which racial identity development takes place. It is a process that does not happen all at once but is gradual and unfolding. It also has an impact upon marital relationships for African Americans because it takes into consideration how people are affected by their relationship to culture and race.

Huyck (1995) made the point that a marital relationship involves social roles which are impacted throughout the life course and life cycle--by individual lifetime events, childbirth/retirement and also by historical time (e.g., changing women's roles). It then



becomes evident that the experiences of older African Americans would be affected by their sociohistorical context. Life cycle theory has a direct link with Parham's (1989a, 1989b) supposition that life cycle status affects how one perceives his or her racial identity development. The idea of recycling also seems to mesh with the more updated versions of life cycle theory in that people have the potential to reexperience certain life events.

It becomes more evident that there exists a connection, a relationship, between the theories that form a woven frame that supports the proposed research study. The realization that the marriages of older adults exist both in their personal and familial life cycles as well as the larger social environment facilitates the knowledge that the generalizability of the study's findings will have to be interpreted with great care. The application of the racial identity development theory is also a novelty for the older population. The effect of the variables, age, gender, income level, and length of marriage, is also yet to be seen. The extant literature makes it clear that the examination of the older African American couple is the necessary next step in this branch of inquiry.

### Summary of Literature Review

The literature that has been presented in this chapter forms a base from which to better understand the present research project. The theoretical underpinning for the study is based upon the notion that older adults experience certain events in the life cycle and that they are affected by their personal and social environments and history. The development of racial identity attitudes occurs across the lifespan and is impacted by both current and past experiences. Marital satisfaction appears to increase over the

marital life span; therefore, the variables of age and length of marriage were expected to impact marital satisfaction. Income level was also presumed to affect reactions to marital life circumstance. Gender was expected to make a significant difference in the manner in which men and women perceived their marriages. Additionally, it was hypothesized that, in this study, the results would reveal that older African American couples will have similar, or complementary, racial identity attitudes which will result in marriages that are relatively satisfied.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This research project aimed to examine the nature of marital satisfaction and racial identity development in older African American married couples and augment the extant literature on this subject. Factors such as age, gender, length of marriage, income, and educational level were explored relative to marital satisfaction and racial identity development levels. This chapter describes the proposed methodology for data collection and analysis. The pertinent variables, research hypotheses, sampling procedure, research design, instrumentation, and projected methods of data collection and analysis are presented.

#### Delineation of Relevant Variables

##### Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were examined in this research study. Marital satisfaction and racial identity development levels of older African American couples were surveyed. Marital satisfaction is the level of relationship “contentedness” perceived by the spousal partners and was assessed by the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (Haynes, Floyd, Rogers, Winemiller, Heilman, Werle, Murphy, & Cardone, 1992). Racial identity development refers to the manner in which a person experiences his or her race in relation to self and others (Helms, 1993). The Black Racial

Identity Attitude Scale (Form RIAS-B) (Parham & Helms, 1981) was utilized to assess this dependent variable.

#### Independent Variables

A total of four independent variables were selected for the present research study. Age, length of marriage, income level, and gender were examined for their impact upon marital satisfaction and racial identity development in African American couples. These variables were chosen because of their support in the extant literature detailing the influence of each in the lives of older married adults (Gilford, 1984; Huyck, 1995; Orbuch et al., 1996; Tucker et al., 1993).

#### Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were evaluated in this study:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and racial identity in older African American couples.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and age in older African American couples.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and length of marriage of older African American couples.

Ho4: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and income in older African American couples.

Ho5: There is no significant relationship between racial identity and age in older African American couples.

Ho6: There is no significant relationship between racial identity and length of marriage in older African American couples.

Ho7: There is no significant relationship between racial identity and income level in older African American couples.

Ho8: There are no significant mean differences between marital satisfaction and gender in older African American couples.

Ho9: There are no significant mean differences between racial identity and gender in older African American couples.

### Research Design

This research project employed a correlational research design. According to Borg and Gall (1989), this type of design is especially useful for education and behavioral science research. This is because correlational studies enable the examination of the relationships between a large number of variables within one project.

The proposed study utilized the correlational design in an attempt to ascertain influences on marital satisfaction and racial identity development by a number of independent variables such as age, sex, length of marriage, and income level. The design also facilitated the description of the relationship between the dependent variables.

### Population

The population of this study was comprised of African American couples residing in a small Southeastern city. The husbands and wives were at least 55 years of age because African American persons tend to ascribe aging status to themselves at a relatively early chronological age (Jackson, 1972; Tate, 1983). It is also well documented

that African American individuals have shorter life expectancies than members of the dominant culture (Edmonds, 1993; Kart, 1994). Some couples were involved in their second marriage. The participants were recruited from churches, fraternal organizations, community agencies, volunteer organizations (e.g., RSVP, Foster Grandparents), and personal contacts.

### Sample and Sampling Procedures

Participants in this study were older African American marital dyads. Extant research (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994) indicated that the ability to link the responses of husbands and wives on measures of marital satisfaction was needed for a more complete picture of the marriage. For inclusion in the project, these individuals needed to be at least 55 years of age, a member of a married couple, and racially consider themselves members of the Black community. Participants were recruited through a wide range of resources. Churches, volunteer agencies (e.g., Foster Grandparents, Retired Senior Volunteer Program) and public libraries in Alachua, Duval, Indian River and Palm Beach Counties were contacted. The researcher first established contact with a member of the organization to request his or her assistance in identifying potential participants for the study.

This role of cultural "mediator" or "liaison" (Wood, 1989) was critical for involving this population of older couples. The mediator or liaison was a contact person of the agency or organization who was known and respected by members of the older Black community. These people provided the introductions between the researcher and the potential participants and offered their support to the proposed project. These

individuals were able to provide a sense of legitimacy and safety to the research project which was critical in facilitating participation levels.

The author contacted the members of these organizations to explain the purpose of the study and the importance of the older Black volunteers. Meetings were then set up to introduce the “cultural mediator” to the assessment instruments and to further acquaint him or her with the research project goals and procedures. They received copies of the packet that was administered to the older African American couples which consisted of the cover letter and release form, the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (MSQFOP), the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B), and the Personal data sheet.

After receiving names of the members of churches or local organizations who fit the participant profile, the author requested that they meet at a central location (e.g., church hall or recreation room) so that they could be administered the packet of materials consisting of the cover letter and release form, the assessment instruments, and personal data sheet. The couples also were directed to work independently of one another. Upon completion of the materials, all study participants had the option of returning an anonymous request for a debriefing sheet that outlined the goals, hypotheses, and research results of the project. These data were collected in the winter of 1998 after receiving permission from the University of Florida Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

### Instrumentation

Two standardized questionnaires were utilized for data collection. A personal data sheet was also distributed.

#### Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons

The primary instrumentation for the study was the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (MSQFOP). This assessment tool was developed specifically for use with an older population and utilizes some of the same domains as other marital satisfaction inventories but includes items specific to older age (e.g., health assessment of spouse) and omits items more pertinent to child-rearing.

The MSQFOP was developed as a result of a 4-year study that had at its aim the construction of a valid marital assessment tool that was appropriate for older individuals. The final result was a 24-item marital satisfaction questionnaire. Twenty items directly assess "specific areas of marital distress" which generate a "marital satisfaction scale score" (Haynes et al., 1992, p. 474). The final four items examine the respondent's global satisfaction with the marriage and his or her perception of changes over time.

The MSQFOP has been found to have satisfactory reliability and validity. The test-retest Pearson correlation for the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire For Older Persons scale was .84. According to the authors, the test-retest correlations for individual items ranged from .70 to .93. This assessment tool was also evaluated for its criterion-related validity with a well established measure of marital satisfaction--the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. The correlation between the two instruments was .82 ( $p < .001$ ). Construct validity was evaluated by "estimating the shared variance between



the MSQFOP and two other variables with which [it] would be expected to be moderately correlated: (a) life satisfaction and (b) spouse reports of pleasing and displeasing behaviors displayed at home" (Haynes et al, 1992). These constructs were to be measured with the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Spouse Observation Checklist. The results proved that there is a high correlation between the MSQFOP and the Life Satisfaction Scale as well as a significant association with the Spouse Observation Checklist.

A factor analysis was also performed on the MSQFOP, and it was determined that three factors were responsible for 69% of the variance in spouse's scores. The three factors were Communication/Companionship (accounted for 58% of variance), Sex/Affection (accounted for 6% of variance), and Health (accounted for 5% of score variance).

#### Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Form R IAS-B)

This is an attitudinal scale which assesses an individual's racial identity stage or status (e.g., Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization). The scale is comprised of 30 items which utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to assess individuals' racial identity attitudes. Scores for each status, or stage, are obtained by adding the responses to correspondingly keyed items. Each participant then has a subscale score for each type of racial identity attitude. Internal consistency reliability estimates for these subscales are as follows: Preencounter = .69, Encounter = .72, Immersion/Emersion = .66, and Internalization = .71 (Helms, 1993). A factor analysis was also used to

illustrate the relationship between the assessment items and the types of racial identity attitudes.

#### Personal Data Sheet

A personal data sheet was distributed to all respondents to assess their individual characteristics. Participants were asked to provide information regarding their age, sex, length of marriage, educational level, and income level.

#### Data Collection and Data Analyses

The data were collected by the principal researcher of this research project. "Cultural mediators" were contacted for introductions to potential study participants. The researcher then screened the older couples for their involvement in the study based upon their age, race, and marital status. Couples who were deemed suitable for inclusion in the study were administered the personal data sheet, the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons, and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale.

Upon completion of data collection, data analyses were performed utilizing multiple regressions for the first seven hypotheses with the means for the couples. Dependent t-tests were then used to analyze the final two hypotheses that examined the relationship of gender to marital satisfaction and racial identity development in older African American couples. Pearson product-moment correlations were also calculated to examine the relationships among the variables.

#### Limitations of Aging Research

The tradition of empirical inquiry has been the norm in the field of gerontology since its inception (Kart, 1994); however, the challenge of conducting research with older

populations, and in particular older persons of color, cannot be overlooked.

Methodological concerns that can arise in conducting research with members of the older population relate to the overutilization of cross-sectional studies, sampling, and age/period/cohort problems (Kart, 1994; Levenson et al., 1993). The present study utilized a cross-sectional design. This presented a problem when focusing on long-term marriages, as there was no provision of historical context or developmental nature. For example, perhaps only couples with satisfactory relationships managed to remain in long-term marriages and the unhappy couples separated or divorced (Levenson et al., 1993). Longitudinal studies, however, are time-consuming and costly, and this precludes many researchers from undertaking such an endeavor.

The issue of generalizability must be considered when analyzing the results of research findings in this area. The manner in which investigators obtain samples is called into question when volunteerism is the primary method (Atchley, 1992). Volunteers for a study on marital satisfaction may be those couples that are more satisfied with their relationships. Those who are not happily married may choose not to participate in such a study. Although the participants for the proposed research study were volunteers, the difficulty in obtaining study respondents who were members of minority groups contributed to the validity of the project.

The age/period/cohort problem is aptly named by gerontological researchers. Kart (1994) described the interaction of these factors and how "groups of researchers came to realize the importance of conceptually distinguishing among maturational factors (age), biographical factors (cohort), and environmental factors (period of measurement). This

realization is now fundamental to all research on matters of the life course" (p. 38). For example, when studying older Black couples who are sharing perceptions of their married life, the question of social desirability is a consideration. The influence of the nature of the research on this cohort of people who traditionally eschew divorce or separation is a factor when interpreting results.

Acknowledgment of the potential shortcomings of any study is sound research behavior. However, addressing these concerns facilitates an increased understanding of the need and the appropriateness of the present research. This study suggests an examination of an understudied population--older African American couples. The data generated by this investigation may provide an important stepping stone to future researchers in this area.

It is hoped that the results of the study will assist clinicians and educators with furthering their understanding of the needs of an older minority group population. Clinicians are likely to encounter increasing numbers of older adults, including African Americans, and the particular needs and life circumstances of older people must be adequately addressed.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of later life relationships for older African American couples by examining the levels of marital satisfaction and racial identity within a sample. Additionally, the study examined the impact of independent variables such as age, length of marriage, and income level on marital satisfaction and racial identity.

Data were completed on 46 married African American couples. Each participant was at least 55 years of age. The couples who took part in the study were recruited through churches, senior organizations, and personal contacts.

Data analysis results are presented in this chapter and include descriptive statistics of participant characteristics, inferential statistical analyses of the research hypotheses, and a summary of the research findings.

#### Descriptive Information of the Participants

Descriptions of the participants' age and length of marriage are presented in Table 2. In Table 3 the educational background of the survey respondents is illustrated, and in Table 4 the income information for the participants is presented. The respondents' scores on the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons are presented in Table

5. Scores for the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale are presented in Table 6. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients are reported in Table 7.

Table 2

Demographic Information for the Sample by Age and Length of Marriage

Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
<u>Age</u>			
Male Spouse	46	67.50	8.25
Female Spouse	46	65.41	7.35
All Couples	46	66.45	7.33
<u>Length of Marriage</u>			
All couples	46	39.72	13.52

Age. Forty-six married African American couples participated in this research project. Participants' ages ranged from 55 to 91. The mean age for all of the respondents was 66.5 years of age. The males' ages ranged from 55 to 91 year of age. Their mean age was 67.5. The females' ages ranged from 55 to 82 years old and their mean age was 65.4.

Length of marriage. The length of marriage for the couples in the study varied widely; however, the average length of marriage for the couples was 39.7 years with a standard deviation of 13.52 years.

Educational level. Most of the participants had a high school or college education. The educational status for the couples was based upon the higher reported level of the pair (Table 3). One couple (2.2%) reported an elementary school education as the highest

Table 3

Participants' Educational Level

Category	Frequency	%
<u>Male</u>		
Elementary School	3	7
Junior High School	4	9.3
High School	10	23.3
Some College	9	20.9
College Degree	10	23.3
Advanced Degree	7	16.3
<u>Female</u>		
Elementary School	2	4.4
Junior High School	4	8.9
High School	7	15.6
Some College	14	31.1
College Degree	6	13.3
Advanced Degree	12	26.7
<u>All Couples</u>		
Elementary School	1	2.2
Junior High School	2	4.3
High School	5	10.9
Some College	14	30.4
College Degree	10	21.7
Advanced Degree	14	30.4

combined level of educational attainment. Two couples (4.3%) stated that junior high school was their highest educational level, and five couples (10.9%) had a high school diploma as the highest formal learning experience. Fourteen couples (30.4%) had some college experience; 10 couples (21.7%) reported earning a college degree as the higher

educational level; and 14 couples (30.4%) had received an advanced degree. Three men and one woman declined to give information related to their educational level.

For the males in the study, three (7%) reported having an elementary school education and four men (9.3%) had a junior high education. Ten male participants had a high school diploma (23.3%); 9 (20.9%) had some college education; and 10 (23.3%) had a college degree. Seven of the men (16.3%) had an advanced degree.

The females who participated in the research project had a higher level of educational attainment than the males. Only two female participants (4.4%) had an elementary school education, and four women (8.9%) had a junior high school education. Seven female respondents (15.6%) had a high school diploma while 14 women (31.1%) reported having some collegiate experience. Six women (13.3%) had completed a college degree, and 12 women (26.7) had earned at least one advanced degree.

Income status. Most couples reported a relatively high level of income (Table 4). The mean income level for the couples took into consideration that some spouses reported different amounts of their household income. Seven individuals did not report an income level. Four couples (10.3%) reported an income of less than \$10,000. One couple (2.6%) reported one spouse as having an income between \$10,000 and \$19,999 while the other reported an income between \$20,000 and \$29, 000. Eight couples (20.5%) responded that their household income ranged from \$20,000 to \$29,000. Three couples (7.7%) reported that one of the spouses had an income between \$20,000 and \$29,000 while the other spouse's income was \$30,000+. Finally, 22 couples (56.4%) reported that their household income exceeded \$30,000.



Table 4

Participants' Income Status

Category	Frequency	%
<u>All Couples</u>		
0-\$9,999	4	10.3
\$10,000-\$19,999/ \$20,000-\$29,000*	1	2.6
\$20,000-\$29,999	8	20.5
\$20,000-\$29,000/ \$30,000+ *	3	7.7
\$30,000+	22	56.4

\*Denotes two different income levels reported by each spouse.

Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (MSQFOP). For the purposes of this study, marital satisfaction was defined as "the sense of well-being, contentment, and overall good feeling, including camaraderie, affection and safety" (Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, p. 21, 1992). It was assessed by measuring the total score of 20 statements using a 6-point Likert scale (1= very dissatisfied to 6=very satisfied) (Table 5). Therefore, out of a possible 120 points, the mean score for the couples was 91.77 (with a range between 34 to 120) with a standard deviation of 15.17. The mean score for the males was 92.78 with a standard deviation of 13.76. The females' mean marital satisfaction score was 90.76 with a standard deviation of 20.18.

Table 5

Participants' Scores on the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons

Category	N	Mean Score <sup>a</sup>	Standard Deviation
Males	46	4.63	0.68
Females	46	4.53	1.00
All Couples	46	4.58	0.75

<sup>a</sup>On a 6-point scale, 1=very dissatisfied, 6=very satisfied.

The degree of marital satisfaction was also calculated by dividing each score on this measurement by the total number of items (20). As a result, the husbands in the sample scored 4.63 (between "somewhat satisfied" and "satisfied") with a standard deviation of 0.68. The wives in the study had similar scores of 4.53 which also fell midway between "somewhat satisfied" and "satisfied" and had a standard deviation of 1.00. The mean marital satisfaction score for all the couples was 4.58 (standard deviation 0.75) which again fell between the same parameters.

Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Form RIAS-B). Helms (1993) purported that the stages, or statuses, that African American individuals experience during the course of their lifetimes can be quantitatively measured (Table 6). The stages of racial identity development are as follows: Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization. In successive order, the stages describe the passage of the individual from immersion in the dominant culture (Preencounter stage), to conflict over the increasing

awareness of one's Black identity (Encounter stage), then complete identification with all things African American to the exclusion of other perspectives (Immersion/Emersion stage) to, finally, an integration of a variety of worldviews which included a celebration of the Afrocentric view (Internalization stage). The RIAS-B purported to measure the attitudes associated with each of the identity development stages.

Table 6

Participants' Scores on the Subscales of the Black Racial Identity Scale  
(Form RIAS-B)

Category	Mean Scores <sup>a</sup>	Standard Deviation
<b>Males</b>		
Preencounter	1.96	0.57
Encounter	2.43	0.67
Immersion/Emersion	2.48	0.51
Internalization	3.72	0.38
<b>Females</b>		
Preencounter	1.85	0.46
Encounter	2.27	0.70
Immersion/Emersion	2.39	0.45
Internalization	3.74	0.44
<b>All couples</b>		
Preencounter	1.82	0.38
Encounter	2.33	0.58
Immersion/Emersion	2.43	0.40
Internalization	3.69	0.36

<sup>a</sup>On a 5-point scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = uncertain, 5 = strongly agree.

Therefore, racial identity attitudes were assessed by computing scores for the measure's four subscales. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The subscales were worth, respectively, 45 points (Preencounter), 15 points (Encounter), 40 points (Immersion/Emersion), and 40 points (Internalization). Total scores were generated and then divided by the number of items on each subscale. The mean score for the couples on the Preencounter subscale was 16.45 with a standard deviation of 3.46. The males' mean score was 17.68 with a standard deviation of 5.15. The women's mean score on the Preencounter subscale was 16.65 with a standard deviation of 4.22. This subscale contained nine items which provided the following scores: The mean couple score was 1.82 with a standard deviation of 0.38; the mean score for the males was 1.96 with a standard deviation of 0.57; and the women had an average score of 1.85 with a standard deviation of 0.46. These scores indicated disagreement with statements that assessed Eurocentric values and worldview or eschewed identification with African American culture.

For the Encounter subscale, the couples' mean score was 7.0 with a standard deviation of 1.74. The men had a mean score of 7.30 (standard deviation 2.03) and the women had a mean score of 6.81 (standard deviation 2.12) on the Encounter subscale. Three items measured the Encounter attitudes. Dividing the total scores by the number of items produced a mean couple score of 2.33 with a standard deviation of 0.58 and a mean score for the men of 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.67. The women had an overall score of 2.27 with a standard deviation of 0.70. The participants' scores indicated

disagreement with the statements that measured conflict between Afrocentric and Eurocentric worldviews.

The mean score for the couples on the seven-item Immersion/Emersion subscale was 17.01 with a standard deviation of 2.85. The male participants had a mean score of 17.41 with a standard deviation of 3.59, and the female participants had a mean score of 16.74 with a standard deviation of 3.20. Further calculations showed the couples to have a mean score of 2.43 (standard deviation 0.40) while the men's mean score was 2.48 (standard deviation 0.51) and the women's mean score was 2.39 (standard deviation 0.45). Again, all the scores that were reported disagreement with statements that measured attitudes of complete immersion and idealization of African American people and culture.

The final subscale, Internalization, had a couple mean score of 33.25 with a standard deviation of 3.25. The men's mean score on the Internalization subscale was 33.54 with a standard deviation of 3.42. The women had a mean score of 33.71 with a standard deviation of 4.00. The Internalization subscale contained nine items. As a result of again dividing the total score by the number of items, the average score for the couples was 3.69 with a standard deviation of 0.36. The mean for the male participants was 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.38, and the mean for the female participants was 3.74 with a standard deviation of 0.44. These scores indicated that all participants viewed themselves as being between "uncertain" and "agree" on statements measuring an integrated world view that celebrated African heritage and an Afrocentric worldview while also supporting the beliefs and values of other racial and ethnic groups.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated for all of the measures that were surveyed and the results are displayed in Table 7. The only relationship to have a significantly strong correlation was the negative relationship between the Preencounter subscale of racial identity and marital satisfaction ( $r = -0.77$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). This indicated that couples who had a higher score on the preencounter subscale of the racial identity attitude scale had lower levels of marital satisfaction. Therefore, couples who had a stronger identification with Eurocentric values and perspectives tended to report less satisfactory marital relationships.

Table 7

#### Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables Reporting only Significant Correlates

	MS	PRE	ENC	IM	INT	AGE	YRS	INC
MS								
PRE	-0.77							
ENC	-0.43	0.38						
IM								
INT		-0.39						
AGE		0.31*						
YRS						0.35		
INC						-0.47		

Note. MS = Marital Satisfaction, PRE = Preencounter, ENC = Encounter, IM = Immersion/Emersion, INT = Internalization.

\* $p < .07$

$p < .05$

Moderate negative correlations were observed between a number of items.

Participants' scores on the Encounter subscale of racial identity were negatively correlated with marital satisfaction ( $r = -0.43, p < .01$ ) which indicated that couples whose scores reflected conflict between African American experiences and values and that of the dominant culture had lower marital satisfaction scores. Another negative correlation was found between the respondents' scores on the Preencounter subscale and the Internalization subscales of racial identity ( $r = -0.39, p < .05$ ). This was interpreted as couples who did not identify with African American culture did not have more integrated world views as represented by the Internalization score. Finally, the last negative correlation was noted between the participants' age and income level ( $r = -0.47, p < .01$ ). Therefore, the oldest couples in the sample seemed to have lower income levels.

Moderate positive correlations were observed between the Preencounter subscale (measure of Eurocentric dominated viewpoint) and Encounter subscale (measure of conflict between identification with dominant culture and increasing awareness of Black identity) ( $r = 0.38, p < .05$ ). This indicated that couples who did not identify as strongly with African American people and culture also experienced conflict between the two viewpoints. The modest positive correlation between length of marriage and age ( $r = 0.35, p < .01$ ) indicated, not surprisingly, that the couples married for the longest periods of times tended to be the older couples in the sample.

Although it did not meet the criteria for  $p < .05$ , the age of participants and their scores on the Preencounter subscale of the racial identity scale ( $r = 0.31, p < .07$ ) was of

interest because it denoted that the participants who were older seemed more likely to have higher levels of a Eurocentric orientation.

### Statistical Results of the Research Hypotheses

The findings related to each of the nine research questions are presented. To test Hypotheses 1 through 7, a series of multiple regressions were performed. Dependent t-tests were utilized for Hypotheses 8 and 9 because these questions examined the mean differences between gender in the sample of older couples.

#### Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4

The data analysis procedure for the first four hypotheses was a multiple regression equation. The four hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1 stated that there is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and racial identity in older African American couples.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and age in older African American couples.

Hypothesis 3 stated that there is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and length of marriage of older African American couples.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and income in older African American couples.

Table 8 presents the regression analysis for the factors affecting marital satisfaction in older African American couples. Results of the regression analysis indicated that the variables accounted for 67% of the variance. The only significant effect was the negative impact on marital satisfaction of couples who identified with the



Preencounter status of racial identity which indicates an Eurocentric worldview and beliefs. Couples who experienced a 1 point increase on the Preencounter measures experienced a 2.5 point decrease on their marital satisfaction score. The couples in the study who scored higher on the Preencounter scale tended to score lower on the measure of marital satisfaction. No significant relationships were found between marital satisfaction and age, length of marriage, or income in older African American couples.

Table 8

Multiple Regression Analysis of Marital Satisfaction by Racial Identity Level, Age, Length of Marriage, and Income

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t	p
Preencounter status	-2.45	0.99	-2.46	0.03
Encounter status	-3.49	1.90	-1.83	0.09
Immersion/emersion status	0.41	0.90	0.45	0.65
Internalization status	0.83	0.88	0.94	0.36
Age	0.15	0.41	0.36	0.72
Length of Marriage	-0.15	0.28	-0.54	0.59
Income Level	-1.09	3.44	-0.31	0.75

$p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .67$

### Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7

The data analysis procedure that was utilized for Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 was also the multiple regression equation. The stated hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 5 stated that there is no significant relationship between racial identity and age in older African American couples.

Hypothesis 6 stated that there is no significant relationship between racial identity and length of marriage of older African American couples

Hypothesis 7 stated that there is no significant relationship between racial identity and income in older African American couples.

Tables 9 through 12 present the regression analysis for the factors affecting racial identity in older African American couples. Results of the regression analysis indicated that there were no significant effects for these analyses. Therefore, there appears to be no significant relationship between racial identity and age, length of marriage, or income level in older African American couples.

Table 9

### Multiple Regression Analysis of the Preencounter Subscale by Age, Length of Marriage, and Income

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t	p
Age	0.23	0.13	1.74	0.09
Length of Marriage	-0.05	0.07	-0.78	0.44
Income Level	0.68	1.07	0.64	0.52

$p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .13$

Table 10

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Encounter Subscale by Age, Length of Marriage, and Income

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t	p
Age	0.03	0.05	0.73	0.46
Length of Marriage	-0.01	0.02	-0.78	0.43
Income Level	-0.24	0.40	-0.59	0.55

$p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .08$

Table 11

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Immersion/Emersion Subscale by Age, Length of Marriage, and Income

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t	p
Age	-0.01	0.10	-0.18	0.85
Length of Marriage	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.96
Income Level	-0.41	0.91	-0.45	0.65

$p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .01$

Table 12

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Internalization Subscale by Age, Length of Marriage, and Income

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t	p
Age	-0.03	0.12	-0.28	0.77
Length of Marriage	-0.01	0.07	-0.19	0.84
Income Level	-1.17	0.86	-1.35	0.19

$p < .05, r^2 = .09$

Hypotheses 8 and 9

These hypotheses utilized dependent t-tests because the research questions specified an examination of intra-couple differences by gender (Table 13). The stated hypotheses were as follow:

Hypothesis 8 stated that there is no significant mean differences between males and females on marital satisfaction in older African American couples.

Hypothesis 9 stated that there is no significant mean differences between males and females on racial identity in older African American couples.

After performing the dependent t-tests, no significant differences were found to indicate that there was a difference by gender on scores of marital satisfaction and racial identity. The men and women who participated in this research project appeared to vary little in their responses on both the marital satisfaction and the racial identity attitude assessment instruments.

Table 13

Dependent t-tests of Mean Differences Between Marital Satisfaction and Racial Identity and Gender

	N	Male Means	Female Means	T-Value	Prob.
Marital Satisfaction	46	92.78	90.76	0.83	0.41
Preencounter Scale	31	17.68	16.65	1.17	0.25
Encounter Scale	35	7.30	6.81	1.40	0.16
Immersion/ Emersion Scale	30	17.41	16.74	0.63	0.53
Internalization Scale	30	33.54	33.71	1.01	0.32

$p < .05$

Summary of Research Findings

The research project analyzed the responses of 46 older African American couples to determine their levels of marital satisfaction and racial identity. Their ages ranged from 55 to 91 and had a mean of 66.5 years with a standard deviation of 7.33. The average length of marriage for the couples was 39.7 years with a standard deviation of 13.52 years. The participants in the sample were, for the most part, highly educated and had a high income level. The educational level for the couples was based upon the higher reported educational level of the pair. Over 50% of the sample reported having either a college or advanced degree. Fifty-six percent of the couples reported having a household income of \$30,000 plus per year. The mean marital satisfaction score for the couples was 4.58. This score was based upon a 6-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 6 = very

satisfied). The couples' mean score on the Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization subscales was, respectively, 1.82, 2.33, 2.43, and 3.69 based upon a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Pearson product-moment correlation analysis indicated only one significant finding at the  $p < .05$  level. There was a negative relationship between scores on the Preencounter subscale of racial identity and marital satisfaction ( $r = -0.77$ ).

In the analyses of the research hypotheses, only one significant result was found. For Hypothesis 1, which examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and racial identity, it was found that couples who identified with the Preencounter status of racial identity had lower levels of marital satisfaction. No other significant differences were found for any of the other research hypotheses.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine levels of marital satisfaction and racial identity in a sample of older African American married couples. Forty-six couples participated in the survey. They completed a personal data sheet, the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Adults, and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale. Three independent variables--age, length of marriage, and income level--were also used to increase the understanding of marital relationships in later life. Gender was also examined to discern if there were any differences in males and females on the assessment instruments. These factors led to the development of nine research hypotheses that were tested utilizing multiple regression analyses and dependent t-tests.

Hypothesis 1 stated that there was no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and racial identity in older African American couples. Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 stated that there were no significant relationships between marital satisfaction and, respectively, age, length of marriage, and income level. Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 stated that there were no significant relationships between racial identity and, respectively, age, length of marriage, and income level. Hypotheses 8 and 9 examined differences by gender. Hypothesis 8 stated that there was no significant mean difference between marital

satisfaction and gender in older African American couples, and Hypothesis 9 stated that there was no mean difference between racial identity and gender in the same older couples.

The results of the study, both descriptive and statistical, are also discussed in this chapter. The limitations of the study are presented as are the implications for theory, clinical practice, education and training, and further research. The chapter concludes with a summary of this research project.

### Discussion of the Descriptive Information

In an effort to uphold current standards of multicultural research (Akbar, 1991; Azibo, 1992; Stanford, 1990), only African American people were surveyed for this study. The results are thus indicative of a small portion of the African American community. Forty-six married couples who were at least 55 years of age and identified themselves as members of the African American community participated in the study.

The mean age for the entire sample of the couples was 66.5 years which is substantially older than that of many couples that have been surveyed on marital satisfaction levels in the extant literature (Ball & Robbins, 1986; Timmer et al., 1996). The couples were married for an average of 39.7 years. The sample also consisted of highly educated participants. Forty percent of the women and 39.6% of the men had a college or advanced degree. This may have been due, in part, to the geographical area in which many of the data were collected. A large proportion of the couples resided in a southeastern university town and may have had connections, either vocational or academic, with this university. Therefore, the sample may not be representative of other similarly sized towns in the region.



The respondents were also financially secure. Approximately 56% of the couples reported having a household income of over \$30,000 per year. This is in contrast with only 10.3% of the respondents reporting incomes at the lower end of the continuum (i.e., less than \$10,000 per year). Again, this information may be related to the high levels of education attained by the sample participants.

There was little variability between the mean scores on the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (MSQFOP) or the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scales Form. The husbands and wives averaged a score of 4.58 on the marital satisfaction assessment instrument. The men scored imperceptibly higher with a mean score of 4.63 while the women had a mean score of 4.53. This scale was constructed on a 6-point Likert scale where 1 = very dissatisfied and 6 = very satisfied. Therefore, the average scores fell halfway between "somewhat satisfied" and "satisfied."

It may be concluded that the couples evaluated their marital relationships as satisfactory. This finding is supported by the literature that documents the prevalence of reportedly happy marriages in later life (Gilford, 1984; Lauer et al., 1990). Although Melton and his associates (1995) conducted an overview of much of the extant literature on marital satisfaction, they were unable to conclude that long-term marriages were satisfactory. However, they did not focus on literature that specifically examined the experiences of older Black adults. Therefore, there is little empirical research with which to compare the current study's results.

The scores on the RIAS-B did not significantly differ between the husbands and the wives who were surveyed for this study. These scales were constructed on a 5-point

Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = uncertain, 5 = strongly agree. The mean couple score on the Preencounter subscale was 1.82, while it was 1.96 for the males and 1.85 for the females. These scores may be interpreted as being relatively low on questions that indicated a more Eurocentric, or dominant culture-oriented, perspective. The mean score for the couple for the Encounter subscale was 2.33, and it was 2.43 for the men and 2.27 for the women. This again indicated disagreement with the statements that measured levels of shock or discomfort at realizing the impact of being a person of color in racist society. On the Immersion/Emersion subscale, the average for the couple was 2.43, and it was 2.48 for the men and 2.39 for the women. Again, the scores primarily indicated disagreement with statements that measured complete immersion within the Black culture. The Internalization subscale, which measured the integration of African American self-confidence and pride with respect for the viewpoints of other racial and cultural groups, was averaged at 3.69 for the couple and 3.72 for the husbands and 3.74 for the wives. These scores fell between the "uncertain" and "agree" parameters which indicated a higher level of internalization for the older couples in the study. Since there has been virtually no racial identity research conducted upon older adults, it is difficult to compare the results to extant research findings. However, Parham's (1989a, 1989b) postulations regarding racial identity across the life span may be relevant to the study results. A higher level of Internalization attitudes for older people may be the result participants' older ages which have exposed them to so many sociopolitical events such as segregation as well as the Black civil rights movement (Baker, 1994) and might have contributed to movement through the racial identity statuses. For example, older

people who have lived through segregation might have naturally experienced a sense of overidentification with the dominant culture (e.g., Preencounter attitudes), and then they might have been participants in the civil rights movements of the 1960s which could have served to awaken pride in their heritage (e.g., Encounter and Immersion/Emersion attitudes). Current struggles to continue the conversation around the issues of race in the United States may involve Internalization attitudes. Movement through time ensured experiences commensurate with history, or perhaps by virtue of surviving in a society where the color of one's skin almost automatically ensures struggles within a European dominated country, African Americans have become resilient and supportive of each other.

Interestingly, although it did not meet the study's criteria for significance at the  $p$  less than .05 level, the relationship between the age of the participants and their scores on the Preencounter subscale were interesting. There was a slight correlation between increased scores on the Preencounter subscale and more advanced age among the participants. This may be again related to the life course notion of people being affected by their existence within certain historical time frames (Bengston & Allen, 1993). In other words, perhaps some older people have been imbued with the notion of the dominant culture as "better" than a more Afrocentric orientation. This may possibly have been a survival method for life in decades past (Boyd-Franklin, 1996).

The relationships among the variables were calculated with Pearson product-moment correlations. The only significant relationship was a negative one between scores on the Preencounter subscale of racial identity and scores of marital satisfaction.

There was also a moderate negative correlation observed between couples' scores on the Encounter subscale of racial identity and their reported marital satisfaction. Thus, there appeared to be a relationship for couples who scored higher on the Preencounter and Encounter subscales because they had lower scores on the marital satisfaction instrument. This seems to contradict Helms' (1993) postulation of social interaction which posits that parallel interactional styles (e.g., both members of the dyad share the same racial identity attitude) predicate a stable and supportive relationship. If this were the case, it would seem that the participants' scores should have increased on the marital satisfaction measure.

As would be expected, there were both a modest positive correlation between participants' scores on the Preencounter and Encounter subscales, and a modest negative correlation between the Preencounter and Internalization subscale. Helms (1993) suggested that there exists some overlap between the nature of the stages (e.g., Preencounter and Encounter) that lie next to each other and, as a result, so do the subscales that purport to measure these attitudes. Following this rationale, it makes sense that scores for the diametrically opposed "Preencounter" stage that typifies a Eurocentric view and the "Internalization" stage that supports an Afrocentric perspective would be negatively related.

Finally, it also comes as no surprise that the oldest participants had, for the most part, the longest marriages and the lowest incomes. This is true for many older couples, although it does offer evidence to support the notion that older Black couples do sustain

marital relationships in later life although demographic statistics report great decreases in these numbers.

### Discussion of the Relationship Among Variables

Results of the regression analyses indicated only that higher scores on the Preencounter subscale of the racial identity attitude scale had significant effects on the marital satisfaction of the older couples. Due to the fact that there is no research currently available on the interactions between racial identity levels and marital satisfaction, there are no studies with which this significant finding can be compared. However, Helms (1995) and others (Cross et al., 1991) have postulated that closer identification with a more Eurocentric orientation may result in lower levels of self-esteem or confidence.

The rest of the hypotheses that sought to determine the relationships between the independent variables (e.g., age, length of marriage, income level) and both marital satisfaction and racial identity resulted in nonsignificant findings. Additionally, the dependent t-tests that were utilized to investigate gender differences on the measures of marital satisfaction and racial identity were also found to be nonsignificant. However, nonsignificant findings can be, in and of themselves, significant in that they provide more information about the population in question and provide direction for future research.

The nonsignificant findings provide a contrast to previously conducted research on older adults. Based upon these findings, it was presumed that there would be a decrease in marital satisfaction for those with less income and education (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). An increase in marital satisfaction was thought to be predicated on the

variable of length of marriage (Orbuch et al., 1996; Weishaus & Field, 1988). There were also expected to be gender differences in the sample with either males reporting greater satisfaction (Askham, 1994; Gilford, 1984). Of course, most of these data were reported for predominantly White samples and, therefore, proved to be nonrepresentative of the experience of this Black population. The discrepancy between the study's findings and previously conducted research on aging and marital satisfaction highlighted the need to investigate the potentially different experiences of African Americans.

This study did support Jackson's (1972) work that demonstrated no gender differences in a study examining marital patterns of dominance for a sample of African American adults. It is also in agreement with Herman's (1994) research which did not find significant age differences for levels of satisfaction.

If spousal support has a positive correlation with mental well-being as Wykle and Musil (1993) suggest, then the predictions for generalizability from this sample look positive. Perhaps the stress of being a member of the older Black population in the United States is mediated by a satisfactory marital relationship (Coke & Twaite, 1995).

#### Limitations of this Study

This study generated many rich data that, until this time, had not been examined in the literature. The generation of new and exciting information about a previously heretofore unacknowledged population must not supersede the shortcomings that are inherent in a study of this size. For example, the findings can only be generated to a small and specific population that mirrors the participants' characteristics. To make broad

interpretations about older Black adults as a group is to do a grave disservice to the heterogeneity of such a large group.

It is also important to remember, however, that older people who were unsatisfied with their relationships may already have selected themselves out of the project through divorce or separation. Perhaps only satisfied married couples chose to participate in the study. There is also the issue of high mortality for African Americans. Helms (1989) has pointed out that the very nature of racial identity research may exclude people who are less comfortable with their own racial identity thus leaving only participants who are further along the continuum of racial identity development

The study also employed a convenience sample with a relatively small total of participants who were highly educated and fairly well off financially. Older African American people with lower educational levels might have been unable to participate in the research project due to difficulty with completing the assessment instruments.

The research project also has conflicts with the inherent difficulties of cross-sectional research. The survey was only able to inquire about a very meaningful issue within one small window of time in the participants' lives.

#### Implications of the Findings and Further Recommendations

The findings of this study have helped to increase knowledge and understanding of marital relationships amount African Americans in later life. The quantitative analyses lend themselves to further interpretation and conjecture regarding theory, clinical practice, education and training, and research.

### Implications for Theory

This study was supported by an interlocking framework of theories. The most evident is the racial identity development theory which was undergirded by both the life cycle and life course perspectives. These paradigms complement one another because they serve as reminders that, for most people, humans do not live in a vacuum or function in an isolated world. The understanding of one's racial and cultural heritage takes place within a constantly changing environment that is peopled by different characters. These processes may have a reciprocal effect on the others and the influences of each are equally important in one's intrapersonal makeup. These theories purport that the understanding and experience of one's self as a person of color (e.g., racial identity) is equally affected by interactions with family members as well as life events and roles (e.g., life cycle) and the social, personal, and political events occurring across time (e.g., life course).

The findings of the study meshed with these interlocking theories. For example, Helms' (1993) idea that some measure of each of the racial identity attitudes is present in some amount at all times and that the stages are neither permanent nor mutually exclusive is upheld by the participants' scores on the assessment instrument. The participants seemed to indicate at least some small levels of each type of attitude. Parham (1989a, 1989b) has made salient contributions to the theory by updating it to include older people. He acknowledged the notion that it is not only young people who struggle with discovering their Black identity, but that it is, in fact, an ongoing lifelong process.

Helms' extrapolation of the impact of racial identity development on counseling situations to potential social interactions (1994, 1995) was not supported by all of the



study's findings. She believed that all parallel relationships, that is, interactions where the participants shared the same racial viewpoint, would be stable and supportive. This is seen for the couples, to some extent, in each of the stages of identity development except for the Preencounter stage. These couples exhibit decreased levels of marital satisfaction.

The results of this study support the life cycle and, particularly, life course theory. The nonsignificant findings indicated that the experiences of older Black couples may be different than those of the samples that have been involved in prior research. Although many of the couples may have experienced the changes in roles and relationships consistent with the life cycle theory (Walsh, 1989), the heterogeneity of the African American population may have been a factor in the study's findings because of the influences of sociohistorical events for both the cohort and the individual (Bengston & Allen, 1993).

#### Implications for Clinical Practice

Much of the extant literature on clinical work with multicultural populations focuses on younger populations (Wykle & Musil, 1993). The results of this study indicated that older African American couples were satisfied with their marital relationships and had moderate levels of Internalization subscale scores which indicated a more holistic view of themselves and their world. However, the individual differences that were obscured in the analytic process may find some dissatisfaction among couples when examined on an individual basis. There does seem to be a need for couples to adjust to later life together to provide a sense of support, companionship, and interdependence

(Meunier, 1994). Practitioners should also be aware of racial concerns both for themselves and for their clients. An increased understanding of the applicability of the RIAS-B to counseling and therapy is valuable. Therefore, it is important for practitioners to be aware of their role in working with older people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Riker and Myers (1995) have explicated the counseling needs of older persons as follows: (a) personal concerns (e.g., changes associated with aging), (b) interpersonal concerns (e.g., relationships with significant others), (c) activity concerns (e.g. retirement and leisure issues), (d) environmental needs (e.g. activities of daily living) and (e) needs related to demographic variables (e.g., age, sex, race). Although it may be argued that these categories are applicable to people of all ages, clinicians must be aware of the special issues that confront older adults such increased number of personal and physical losses, retirement, decreased financial status, increased opportunities to experience bereavement, and confrontation of eventual death. Therefore, appropriate counselor roles might be as providers of therapeutic intervention, educational disseminators, or liaison for support systems (Riker & Myers, 1995).

The therapeutic utilization of the racial identity development model is multifold according to McDavis, Parker, and Parker (1995). Understanding individual or couple scores on the RIAS-B may facilitate understanding of intragroup differences and how African Americans view themselves. It also may predict African American clients' counselor preferences (Helms, 1993, 1984; Parham & Helms, 1981). Awareness of racial similarities and differences is important, but therapists must also remember not to lose sight of individual differences. Individuality can become obfuscated by the guise of

cultural or racial group characteristics (Lee, 1991). Jones (1991) also recommended acknowledgment of social, political, and environmental context when working with Black clients.

Brannon (1983) has discussed the reluctance for African American couples to present for therapy due to misconceptions about the therapeutic process and the stigmatization that is associated with seeking mental health services. Based upon what is known about the help-seeking patterns of older adults (Gafner, 1987), it may be construed that older Black couples will rarely present for therapy on their own. Therefore, when couples do seek services, it may be most appropriate to employ culturally specific interventions such as enlisting the support of the African American community via family or church (McDavis et al., 1995). Perhaps these issues have relevance for social policy in that mental health agencies may need to consider forging linkages with community churches or senior centers (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989) that can lend credibility to potential service providers for older Black individuals and couples. Perhaps mental health providers could be proactive in their interventions by facilitating the establishment of culturally appropriate and relevant gathering places where elders can receive support or intervention (Lee, 1991).

#### Implications for Counselor Education and Training

Although most counselor preparation programs provide some course work and practical experience in the area of multicultural populations, the majority have typically given short shrift to training students about the needs of the older population (Myers et al., 1991). In fact, the groups are not mutually exclusive and need to be looked at in

relation to one another. The increasing numbers of older adults in this society virtually ensure that practitioners will come into contact with senior citizens of a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Programs must incorporate both didactic and experiential learning opportunities in the area of aging (Riker & Myers, 1995) as they have done with multiculturalism. McDavis et al. (1995) recommended experiential training experiences for counselors that go beyond the structured classroom experience. Increasing self-awareness of one's attitudes and beliefs regarding racial group membership is suggested (Lee, 1991) as is increasing personal, social, and political involvement in the African American community.

#### Implications for Future Research

It is evident that there is a need for further research, especially longitudinal research, in this area of study. The growing numbers of older African Americans in the United States (AARP Minority Affairs Information, 1996; Fowles, 1994) warrants increasing research to learn more information about their life circumstances and experiences. Currently, there is simply not enough research that addresses this growing need. Some possible areas of future inquiry regarding older African American couples may be in the areas of health status, family responsibility, and religious beliefs. As members of a minority group that often suffers from low socioeconomic status, personal and vocational prejudice and discrimination, and environmental disadvantages, the health concerns of older Black people may need to be examined in conjunction with their sense of satisfaction with their interpersonal relationships. Family responsibilities such as raising grandchildren or supporting younger members of the extended family may or may

not also take a toll on the relationships of older African Americans (Hines, 1989). The impact of the church on the Black community is well documented (Black, 1996; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coke & Twaite, 1995), and its influence on the lives of older couples has not yet been investigated.

However, these are areas that may or may not be relevant to the lives of older Black people. Perhaps qualitative research could play a part in discerning what is truly important to this population. The older people themselves may be the best source of information regarding the important nuances of culture and race and how they may potentially impact other life concerns (Snider, 1990). Enabling individuals or couples to expound on their ideas or opinions may allow for more flexibility in describing subjective situations than responding to research instruments.

It is hoped that in the future there will be more room for qualitative research with older adults. Gubrium (1992) supported the notion of the increasing importance of qualitative research in the field of gerontology. Ideally, qualitative approaches will facilitate a "way of documenting the aging experience" (p. 582) and help not only the scientific community but also the greater population to "understand what it means to grow or be older, how that varies in time and place, and what is particular and general about the process" (p. 582).

One final suggestion for further inquiry would be to survey unmarried, or common law, couples on the nature of their intimate relationships as well as those of gay or lesbian elders. These relationships merit as much inquiry as do legal unions. Inclusion of these populations was outside the scope of this research project.

### Summary

In conclusion, this research project examined the impact of racial identity attitudes upon marital satisfaction in a population of 46 older African American couples. The effects of age, length of marriage, and income level were also explored in relationship to the two dependent variables. The data were analyzed using multiple regression analyses, dependent t-tests, and Pearson product-moment correlations. Results indicated that couples did not vary greatly--either within couple or compared to the group--on their levels of marital satisfaction or racial identity. The only significant relationship that was found was between marital satisfaction and the Preencounter subscale of the racial identity attitudes assessment tool. This finding indicated that couples with higher levels of Preencounter attitudes had lower level of marital satisfaction. The impact of age, length of marriage, and income level was nonsignificant on the other three racial identity attitude subscales and on the measure of marital satisfaction. There were also no differences based upon racial identity development or marital satisfaction by gender. However, this is a significant finding in that it differs from previously conducted research on White populations that seemed to indicate that those variables did have an impact upon marital satisfaction.

This research project illustrated the difference between findings based upon White samples and served as a reminder for empirical research to focus upon a nondistressed sample as opposed to the research that is problem focused for Black families (McAadoo, 1993). It presented important findings on this group of people in spite of some limitations and added to the state of current knowledge about African American older

people. The study also contributed to the further development of racial identity and family theories and may now serve as a starting point for future research. The implications for counselor educators and practitioners were also noted for their applicability increasing awareness of gerontological and cultural issues in training and practice.

APPENDIX A  
COVER LETTER

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Florida in the Department of Counselor Education. As part of my doctoral dissertation I am conducting an assessment to learn about the relationship between racial identity and marital satisfaction for older African American couples. This is an important study because there is little research in this area. It is critical that counselor educators learn more about what keeps older couples together and if this is related to how people feel about themselves as African Americans. I am asking you to participate by filling out the attached questionnaires. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Your identity will be kept anonymous, therefore, please do not write your name on any pages. The number on each sheet is not connected to your name and allows me to keep all of your responses together. **Please complete the forms separately from your spouse.**

There are no anticipated risks, compensation, or other direct benefits to you as a participant. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and discontinue your participation in the study at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at (352) 337-0082 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Max Parker, at (352) 392-0731 x 238. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant may be directed to the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB) at Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611; ph (352) 392-0433.

Sincerely,

Jenny Wilson

If you would like to receive a copy of the study results upon completion of the project, please return the enclosed postcard. Please include your address only on this card.

*Approved by the  
University of Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB 02)  
for use through November 13, 1998*





APPENDIX C  
MARITAL SATISFACTION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OLDER PERSONS

Please answer the following questions as carefully as possible. You may choose to not answer specific questions but you are encouraged to answer as many as possible.

Please indicate your current level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction for each of the items listed below by circling the number that reflects your experience.

1. The amount of time my spouse and I spend in shared recreational activities:  

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
2. The degree to which my spouse and I share common interests:  

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
3. The day-to-day support and encouragement provided by my spouse:  

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
4. My spouse's physical health:  

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
5. The degree to which my spouse motivates me:  

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied

6. My spouse's overall personality:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
7. The amount of consideration shown by my spouse:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
8. The manner in which affection is expressed between my spouse and me:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
9. How my spouse reacts when I share feelings:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
10. The way disagreements are settled:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
11. The number of disagreements between my spouse and me:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
12. My spouse's philosophy of life:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
13. My spouse's values:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |

14. My spouse's emotional health:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
15. The frequency of sexual or other physically intimate relations with my spouse:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
16. The quality of sexual or other physically intimate relations with my spouse:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
17. The frequency with which my spouse and I have pleasant conversations:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
18. My overall compatibility with my spouse:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
19. How decisions are made in my marriage:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
20. How well my spouse listens to me:
- |                      |              |                          |                       |           |                   |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2            | 3                        | 4                     | 5         | 6                 |
| very<br>dissatisfied | dissatisfied | somewhat<br>dissatisfied | somewhat<br>satisfied | satisfied | very<br>satisfied |
21. Of all the attention you receive from your spouse, what percent is pleasant or positive?
- |         |        |        |         |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1       | 2      | 3      | 4       |
| 0 - 25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | 76-100% |

22. Overall, how satisfied are you with you marriage right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied

23. In the past year, how often have you had significant problems in your marriage?

1	2	3	4
very often	often	seldom	never

24. Compared to five years ago, how satisfied are you with your marriage?

0	1	2	3	4	5
not relevant	much less satisfied	less satisfied	equally satisfied	more satisfied	much more satisfied

APPENDIX D  
BLACK RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES SCALE (FORM B)

JANET E. HELMS  
AND THOMAS A. PARHAM

This questionnaire is designed to measure people's social and political attitudes. There are no right or wrong answers. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

1. I believe that being Black is a positive experience.  
1 2 3 4 5  
strongly disagree disagree uncertain agree strongly agree
2. I know through experience what being Black in America means.  
1 2 3 4 5  
strongly disagree disagree uncertain agree strongly agree
3. I feel unable to involve myself in white experiences and am increasing my involvement in Black experiences.  
1 2 3 4 5  
strongly disagree disagree uncertain agree strongly agree
4. I believe that large numbers of Blacks are untrustworthy.  
1 2 3 4 5  
strongly disagree disagree uncertain agree strongly agree
5. I feel an overwhelming attachment to Black people.  
1 2 3 4 5  
strongly disagree disagree uncertain agree strongly agree

6. I involve myself in causes that will help all oppressed people.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
7. I feel comfortable wherever I am.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
8. I believe that White people look and express themselves better than Blacks.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
9. I feel very uncomfortable around Black people.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
10. I feel good about being Black, but do not limit myself to Black activities.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
11. I often find myself referring to White people as honkies, devils, pigs, etc.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
12. I believe that to be Black is not necessarily good.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
13. I believe that certain aspects of the Black experience apply to me, others do not.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |

14. I frequently confront the system and the man.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
15. I constantly involve myself in Black political and social activities (art shows, political meetings, etc.).
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
16. I involve myself in social action and political groups even if there are no other Blacks involved.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
17. I believe that Black people should learn to think and experience life in ways which are similar to White people.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
18. I believe that the world should be interpreted from a Black perspective.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
19. I have changed my style of life to fit my beliefs about Black people.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |
20. I feel excitement and joy in Black surroundings.
- |                      |          |           |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5                 |
| strongly<br>disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly<br>agree |



21. I believe that Black people came from a strange, dark, and uncivilized continent.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
22. People, regardless of their race, have strengths and limitations.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
23. I find myself reading a lot of Black literature and thinking about being Black.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
24. I feel guilty and/or anxious about some of the things I believe about Black people.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
25. I believe that a Black person's most effective weapon for solving problems is to become a part of the White person's world.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
26. I speak my mind regardless of the consequences (e.g., being exposed to danger, imprisoned).
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |
27. I believe that everything Black is good, and consequently, I limit myself to Black activities.
- |                   |          |           |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | uncertain | agree | strongly agree |

28. I am determined to find my Black identity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	uncertain	agree	strongly agree

29. I believe that White people are intellectually superior to Blacks.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	uncertain	agree	strongly agree

30. I believe that because I am Black, I have many strengths.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	uncertain	agree	strongly agree

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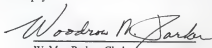
## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jenny Wilson was born on February 3, 1968, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to John and Mary Wilson. She has one older brother, Jeff Wilson. They were somewhat of an unusual family in that they got along well and ate a well-balanced dinner together almost every night.

Jenny received her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Florida in 1989. She then completed her master's and specialist's degrees in counselor education, also at the University of Florida, in 1992. Jenny then decided to seek life experiences beyond the land of citrus and alligators. Upon receiving a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship (1993-1994), she embarked upon many adventures in the United States and abroad. She moved to Colorado and learned to enjoy the thrill of fresh tracks and minimum-wage pay. Jenny also lived and studied in Auckland, New Zealand, for a year. It was there that she learned the importance of cross-cultural communication and how to make a good cup of tea.

Jenny is interested in many areas of research and clinical practice. In addition to continuing to further shape her therapeutic and academic skills, she hopes to make a name for herself as a poet specializing in limericks and haiku.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



W. Max Parker, Chair  
Professor of Counselor Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Ellen Amatea  
Professor of Counselor Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Mary Howard-Hamilton  
Associate Professor of Counselor  
Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



M. David Miller  
Professor of Foundations of  
Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Otto von Mering  
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Education and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 1998

  
Dean, College of Education

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Dean, Graduate School



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